

SEVERAL
DISCOURSES

PREACHED AT THE
TEMPLE CHURCH.

By THO. SHERLOCK, D. D.
Late Master of the TEMPLE,
Now Lord Bishop of LONDON.

VOL. III.



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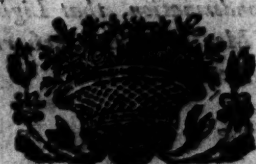
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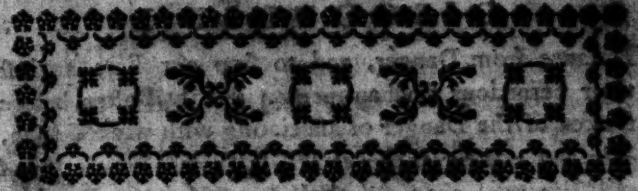
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DISCOURSE



DISCOURSE I.



PROVERBS xix. 27.

*Cease, my Son, to hear the Instruction that causeth to
err from the Words of Knowledge.*

 **T**HAT by the Words of Knowledge in the Text we are to understand the Principles and Dictates of Virtue and Religion, is so well known to all who are in the least acquainted with the Language of Scripture, especially of the Book of *Psalms*, the *Proverbs*, and other Writings of the like Kind, that there is no need to insist upon the Proof of it. This being admitted, the Wise Man's Advice in the Text amounts to this; That we should be careful to guard against the Arts and Insinuations of such as set up for Teachers of Infidelity and Irreligion.

These Teachers are not here considered under the Character of vicious and profligate Men, given up to the Excesses of Lewdness, or to be distinguished by any Marks of desperate or notorious Wickedness: They are spoken of only as Instructors, as Disputers, and as Reasoners against the Words of Knowledge. Such the Wise King forewarns us of, advising us to keep at a

2 DISCOURSE I.

Distance from Danger, and to stop our Ears against their pernicious Enchantments. He had often before spoken of the Danger of associating with wicked Men, *who sleep not, except they do Mischief; who eat the Bread of Wickedness, and drink the Wine of Violence*: But here he points out to us another Sort; Men who have arrived to a Pitch of being gravely and seriously irreligious; who spend their coolest Hours and calmest Thoughts in the Service of Infidelity, and are maliciously diligent to pervert Men from the Acknowledgment of the Truth, and by the very Arms of Heaven, Reason and Understanding, to enlarge the Bounds of the Kingdom of Darkness.

There are two Things, which, in speaking to this Subject, I would beg leave to recommend to your serious Consideration:

First, The several Temptations which Men lie under to listen to such Instructors as the Text refers to.

Secondly, The great Danger there is in listening to them.

It is one Step towards Security to see the Dangers we are exposed to: For, when we know the weak Places, which are least able to support themselves against the Enemy's Strength, we shall double our Diligence to guard against any Surprise from those Parts. It will be of great Service to us therefore to know the Weaknesses of our own Minds, to understand the Prejudices and Passions which conspire together to deliver us up as a Prey to those who lie in wait for our Ruin. This, if any thing, will enable us to rescue ourselves, by arming us with Resolution to withstand the Temptations which we are acquainted with beforehand. Infidelity has no Rewards or Punishments to bestow: It affords at best but a very hopeless and comfortless Prospect: which would make a considering Man wonder whence the

the Temptations to it should arise, and what should give that Keanness which appears in the Passion with which some Men maintain and propagate it. Wicked and profligate Men indeed are under some Temptation from Self-Interest to wish well to the Cause of Infidelity, in opposition to both Natural and Revealed Religion; because it sets them free from the Fears of Futurity, and delivers them from the many uneasy Thoughts that attend them in all their vicious Pleasures and Enjoyments. To live at once under the Dominion of our Passions and the Rebuke of our Minds, to be perpetually doing what we are perpetually condemning, is of all others the most wretched Condition: And it is no Wonder that any Man should strive to be delivered from it, or that those, who resolve to enjoy the Pleasure of Sin here, should wish to be delivered from the Fear of Punishment hereafter. This then is a very great Temptation to Men to hope that all their Fears are false and ill-grounded; and that Religion, from whence they flow, is nothing but the Cunning of wise Men, and the Simplicity of weak ones. Since therefore the Fears and Apprehensions of Guilt are such strong Motives to Infidelity, the Innocence of the Heart is absolutely necessary to preserve the Freedom of the Mind: Which, if duly weighed, is a good Reason why a Man, as long as he finds himself swayed by Appetite and the Pleasures of Vice, should suspect his own Judgment in a Matter where his Reason is so absolutely chained down by Passion and Interest, and disabled from exerting itself to do its proper Work and Office.

Consider too; In the most unhappy Circumstances of Sin and Guilt, Religion opens to us a much safer and more certain Retreat, than Infidelity can possibly afford, and will more effectually extinguish the Fears and Torments we labour under, and restore the long-

forgotten Peace and Tranquillity of the Mind: For, after all the Pains we can take with ourselves to close up our Minds, and to shut out the Belief of a superior over-ruling Power, and of a future State of Rewards and Punishments, we cannot be secure of enjoying long even the Comfort we propose to ourselves from it in this Life. We may not always have Strength enough to subdue natural Sense and Reason. Any sudden Shock, either in our Health or in our Fortune, will disperse our animal Spirits, and all the gay Imaginations which attend them, and give us up once again to the cruel Torments of cool Thought and Reflection. Then will our Fears rally their Forces, and return upon us with double Strength: Hell and Damnation will constantly play before our Eyes, and not suffer the least Glimpse of Comfort to enter, nor leave us Courage to repent of our Sins, or to fly to our last and only Hope, the Mercy of God. To the Truth of what I say, witness the latest and the bitterest Hours of dying Sinners! Hours of Woe and Despair! in which the Soul, conscious of its own Deserts, anticipates the Pains of Hell, and suffers the very Torments of the Damned! in which it feels the Worm which never dies beginning to gnaw, and lies expiring amidst the Terrors of Guilt, without Power either to think of God, or to forget Him! So that all that Sinners get by forming to themselves Resolutions of Unbelief (for that I take to be the true Case of such Unbelievers as we are now speaking of) is to render their Case more desperate; to cut off all Retreat to the Mercy of God, when the Day of their Distress overtakes them; and to lay up in store for themselves a double Portion of Misery, both in this Life and that which is to come.

Since then even the Hopes which Sinners conceive from Unbelief in this World, that they shall undisturbedly

disturbedly enjoy the Pleasures of Vice without suffering under the Rebukes of their own Minds, are so very uncertain, so liable to be dissipated by every cross Accident of Life; since they cannot alter their Condition, except for the worse, in the Life to come; it must needs be allowed that Sinners make a very ill Choice for themselves, when they sacrifice the Powers of the Mind to the Passions of the Heart. As long as Men retain a Sense of God and Religion upon their Minds, there is great Hope that some Time or other Reason will prevail, and extricate the Man from the Misery of Sin. Good Principles are the Seeds of good Actions: And, though the Seed may be buried under much Rubbish, yet, as long as there is Life in it, there is a reasonable Expectation of seeing Fruit from it some time or other: But, when Reason and Understanding are depraved, and as far corrupted as the very Passions of the Heart; when thus *the Blind leads the Blind*, what else can we expect, but that *both fall into the Ditch?*

But Vice is not the only Root from which Infidelity springs; nor are all, who profess themselves Unbelievers, to be charged with uncommon Degrees of Wickedness. Happy were it for Mankind, were there but one Temptation to one Vice! Common Diligence might then secure the single Pass against the Enemy; whereas now, whilst we guard the most suspected Place, the strongest often falls into his Hands; And thus it sometimes happens in the Case before us, that, whilst we act with a Superiority to all the Vanities of the World, to all the Allurements and Temptations of bodily Pleasure, Reason itself is betrayed by the Vanity of our Hearts, and sinks under the Pride and Affectation of Knowledge. To know all that can be attained to by our utmost Diligence and Sagacity, to search in-

to the hidden Causes of Things, to examine the Truth and Reality of our Knowledge, is an Ambition worthy of a rational Soul. But all Kinds of laudable Ambition grow to be vicious and despicable, when, instead of pursuing the real Good which is the true Object, they seek only to make a Shew and an Appearance of it. Thus it is that Ambition for Virtue produces Hypocrisy; Ambition for Courage, empty Boastings and unreasonable Resentments; and, by the same Rule, Ambition for Learning and Knowledge produces Pedantry and Paradoxes: For he who would desire to appear to know more than other Men, is ready to contradict the Sense and Reason of all Men; for the same Cause that he who is desirous to be thought to have more Courage than others, is ready to quarrel with every Man he meets. And this is a Temptation to which many daily sacrifice the Innocence and Integrity of their Minds, whilst they mean little else by the Singularity of their Opinions, than to recommend themselves to the World as Persons of more than ordinary Discernment. That this is no unfair Account of the Conduct of some Unbelievers, will appear by observing the very different, but equally natural, Workings of the Mind in these two different States of it; whilst it seeks real Knowledge and Truth, and whilst it aims only at the Credit and Reputation of Wisdom: And this will help us likewise in examining ourselves, and in judging whether we act with those impartial Views and Regard to Truth, that all rational Men ought to do.

He who sits down to examine Truth, and search after real Knowledge, will equally sift all his Opinions; will reject none, that he has been long possessed of, without good Reason; will admit no new ones without sufficient Authority and Weight of Argument to support them. Wherever he discovers Truth, he gains
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DISCOURSE I.

the Satisfaction he aimed at: His Mind acquiesces in it: Nor is he disappointed in the Event of his Labour and Study, when he finds himself at last in the same Opinion with the rest of the World; with this only Difference, that his Persuasion is the Effect of Reason, theirs perhaps of Prejudice and Custom; which is a Difference that affords much inward Satisfaction and Peace of Mind, but little or no outward Glory, or Credit of Wisdom and Understanding.

In the other Case, when Men aim at being thought wiser and more knowing than others, and labour only to possess the World with an Opinion of their Sagacity, they can have no Satisfaction in discovering the Truth and Reasonableness of any Opinion that is commonly received in the World; for how will they appear wiser than other Men by professing to believe what other Men believe as well as they? They can no otherwise satisfy their Ambition, than by differing from the common Sense and Reason of Mankind; and the whole Bent of their Mind is to support such their Difference with plausible Reason and Argument. This indeed carries with it a great Appearance of Wisdom; for to shew all the World to be in an Error is not the Work of every Day, or of every Man. And how can you expect that such vain Creatures should so far lose sight of the End they propose, as to give their Consent to any well-received Truth, when the very Passion which has Possession of their Soul makes it necessary for them to treat all such Truths with Disdain and Contempt? Why would you have them so absurd, as to examine the Reasonableness of any known Opinion, when to find it reasonable would be the Ruin and Destruction of all their Glory, and set them only upon a Level with the rest of Mankind? Give them any thing that looks like a new Discovery, and they will struggle

hard with their Reason, but they will find something to say in defence of it: But threadbare Truth they hate to be seen in; it is a Dress their Vanity cannot submit to. This sort of Vanity it is, which has furnished the World with Sceptics in every Science, and in Religion above all others. Other Sciences are the Attainments but of a small Part of Mankind; and to triumph over their Errors is at best but a limited Glory: Whereas, Religion being the general Persuasion of the World, to conquer in this Cause looks like universal Monarchy, and seems to be the very Empire of Wisdom and Knowledge, rising out of the Ruins of universal Ignorance and Superstition. And thus it comes to pass, that weak and vain Men often make profession of greater Infidelity than in truth they are guilty of, and are content to give the lye to their own Reason, as well as that of all Mankind, rather than to lose the Credit of differing from the rest of the World.

Consider this Case well, and judge of it from your own Experience and Observation. If the Instances which meet you every Day do not bear witness to the Truth of what I say, believe me not: But, if they do, let the Folly of others teach you so much Wisdom, as not to give up your Reason and Understanding, your Hopes here and for ever, to a senseless, unprofitable Vanity. Try your own Heart by this Rule; and, if ever you have offended against the Majesty of Heaven by endeavouring to expose his sacred Truths, ask yourself this serious Question, Whether you did not betray your Religion in compliment to yourself, to gain the Credit of being a very discerning Man, or set forth your own Ability? If you did, remember, before it is too late, that for all these Things your offended God will call you into Judgment.

There

There is one Sort of Temptation more which I shall mention, and that but briefly: It is a kind of false Shame, which often, in young People especially, prevails over the Fear of God and the Sense of Religion. When they find what Honour is often done to Unbelievers, and how well they are received, whilst Religion suffers under the hard Names of Ignorance and Superstition, they grow ashamed of their Profession; and, if not really, yet affectedly they put on the fashionable Air of Disregard to every thing that is serious. By degrees they harden, till, from being ashamed to own God, they grow bold enough to deny him, encouraged by Example and by Precept to brave his utmost Vengeance.

These are the most common Temptations which betray Men into the Company and Friendship of Unbelievers, *those Instructors which cause to err from the Words of Knowledge.* How much it concerns you to guard against these Temptations will appear, in the Second Place, when we consider the Danger there is in listening to these Instructors.

And here I can only speak to such as have not yet made shipwreck of Reason and Conscience: For, tho' the hardened Unbelievers are in the greatest Danger, yet they are farthest removed from the Power of Conviction: Nor will they perceive what Miseries they lay up in store for themselves, till they come to take possession of their sad Inheritance; and then they will have but too much Time, and too many Calls, to reflect upon the wretched Choice they made. But, as for you, who have not yet renounced your God and your Redeemer; you especially, whose easy Fortunes or flourishing Years expose you to the Temptations of crafty Sinners; give me leave to expostulate this Case with all the Seriousness the Subject requires: And surely this

is a serious Matter, and deserves your coolest Thoughts and Reflections. It is an unpardonable Folly and inexcusable Perverseness for Men to forsake Religion out of Vanity and Ostentation; as if Irreligion were a Mark of Honour, and a noble Distinction from the rest of Mankind. To fear, where there is true Cause of Fear, where our Souls and our eternal Happiness are at stake, is not below the Dignity of a Man. To out-brave God and his Justice is a sad Instance of Courage: And Men, who sin through such ridiculous Vanity, may value themselves for their Bravery in despising the Fears, and their Wisdom in deriding the Weakness of Religion, and exposing the Faith and Credulity of Men; but perhaps a little Time, a very little Time, may shew them what learned Pains they take to dispute themselves into Hell. We must answer for the Vanity of our Reasoning, as well as for the Vanity of our Actions: And, if we take Pains to invent vain Reasoning to oppose to the plain Evidences that God has afforded us of his Being and Power, and to undermine the Proofs and Authorities upon which Religion stands, we may be sure we shall not go unpunished for so notable an Abuse of so rich a Talent entrusted with us by God: Much more, if we debase Reason, which was given us to be the governing Principle of our Lives, and force it to submit and follow our unruly Passions and Affections, much more shall we be liable to the Vengeance of Heaven.

How far Men of irreligious Lives and Principles are chargeable with these Abuses, they can best inform themselves: And surely the Hopes of Immortality, and Fears of Hell, should compose them to so much Seriousness, as to ask themselves that Question. But, after all, if, upon a View of the whole Matter, and of the Evidences that Reason and Revelation afford us

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of a future State, they will not submit to the Doctrines and Precepts of Religion, they must be left to the Event for a fuller Demonstration of their Folly. If there be really a future State of Rewards and Punishments, both the Punishments and the Rewards must be very inconsiderable indeed not to make it worth a Man's while to live up to the Conditions of being happy. So that, when the Dispute is concerning the Folly of Irreligion, we may remit a great deal of the Truth in allowing the Punishment to be less than really it is, and the Argument will still have Force enough to convince Irreligion of Folly. The Punishment in all Cases must exceed the Advantage the Offender will reap by transgressing the Law; or else, as much as the Gain to be reaped by breaking the Law exceeds the Punishment annexed to the Breach, so much Encouragement there will be for Men to offend. Therefore we may be sure that God, who is the wisest of Law-givers, has taken such Care to guard his Laws and Statutes, that there shall be no Encouragement for Offenders. Upon which Account we may assure ourselves, that, let the Pleasures and Advantages of Sin and Irreligion be ever so numerous or great, the Punishment shall still be greater: So that Men shall say, when they are to pay the Price of their Sins, they have sinned exceeding foolishly. Wicked Men spend their Time to no purpose in disputing against the Punishments of Sin, which are revealed to us; I mean, against the Nature of them: For, if they once allow that Sin and Wickedness shall be punished, their own Reason will inform them that the Punishment must at least be so great, as to make it worth a Man's while to abstain from Sin. So that all Sinners must be guilty of Folly in chusing the Sin with the Punishment,

when

when the Punishment must of necessity exceed the Advantage of sinning.

These are the easiest Terms that Sinners can flatter themselves with; and yet, even upon this View, the Pleasures of Sin will prove a dear Bargain. But should the Punishments of another Life be, what we have but too much Reason to fear they will be, what Words can then express the Folly of Sin? Short are your Days in this World, and soon they shall expire: And should Religion at last prove a mere Deceit, we know the worst of it; it is an Error for which we cannot suffer after Death: Nor will the Infidels there have the Pleasure to reproach us with our Mistake; they and we, in equal Rest, shall sleep the Sleep of Death. But should our Hopes, and their Fears, prove true; should they be so unhappy, as not to die for ever; which miserable Hope is the only Comfort that Infidelity affords; what Pains and Torments must they then undergo? Could I represent to you the different States of good and bad Men: Could I give you the Prospect which the blessed Martyr St. Stephen had, and shew you the blessed Jesus at the right Hand of God, surrounded with Angels, and *the Spirits of just Men made perfect*: Could I open your Ears to hear the never-ceasing Hymns of Praise, which the Blessed above *sing to Him that was, and is, and is to come; to the Lamb that was slain, but liveth for ever*: Could I lead you through the unbounded Regions of eternal Day, and shew the mutual and ever-blooming Joys of Saints who are at rest from their Labour, and live for ever in the Presence of God! Or, could I change the Scene, and unbar the iron Gates of Hell, and carry you, through solid Darknes, to *the Fire that never goes out, and to the Worm that never dies*: Could I shew you the apostate Angels fast bound in eternal Chains, or the Souls of wicked Men

overwhelmed with Torment and Despair: Could I open your Ears to hear the Deep itself groan with the continual Cries of Misery; Cries which can never reach the Throne of Mercy, but return in sad Echoes, and add even to the very Horrors of Hell! Could I thus set before you the different Ends of Religion and Infidelity, you would want no other Proof to convince you that nothing can recompense the Hazard Men run of being for ever miserable through Unbelief. But, though neither the Tongues of Men nor of Angels can express the Joys of Heaven, or describe the Pains of Hell; yet, if there be any Truth in Religion, these Things are certain, and near at hand.

Consider therefore with yourselves, that when you judge of Religion, something more depends upon your Choice, than the Credit of your Judgment, or the Opinion of the World. For God's sake! think Religion at least so serious a Thing, as to deserve your coolest Thoughts, and not fit to be determined in your Hours of Gaiety and Leisure, or in the accidental Conversation of public Places. Trust yourself with yourself; retreat from the Influence of dissolute Companions; and take the Advice of the holy Psalmist: *Stand in awe, and sin not: Commune with your own Heart, and in your Chamber, and be still.*



THE HISTORY OF THE
LIFE OF
JAMES OGLETHORPE
BY
JOHN STURGEON

DISCOURSE II

OF THE
NATURE AND
EXTENT OF
THE
RIGHTS OF
MAN

IN
THE
STATE OF
NATURE

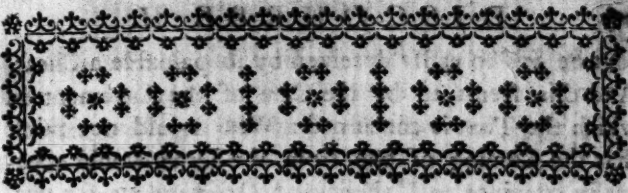
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DISCOURSE II.



LUKE XVI. 31.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the Dead.

T sometimes happens in Matters of Reason, as it often does in Objects of Sense: That which at first Appearance makes a fair Shew, upon Examination proves to be worthless, and of no Esteem. Some Fruits, which allure the Eye most, can the least bear the Test of the Palate: They may be admired by the Traveller, who rides hastily by, and only sees them at a distance; but when they are served up at the Table, the Taste soon rectifies the Mistake of the Eyes. So likewise, in Matters of Reason: Some Arguments strike the Fancy immediately, and take the Judgment captive, before it has Time fairly to examine the Merits of the Cause; and yet, when the Vigour of the first Onset is over, and Time is given for Reflection, the Demonstration dwindles into nothing, and leaves a Man admiring that

that he was so easily deceived by so palpable a Cheat. And this seems to be the Case of the Argument in which the Text is concerned: Who would not think that the Coming of one from the Dead would effectually convince an Unbeliever? Or, were we for ourselves to desire the last Evidence for a future State, what more should we desire, than to see one come from the Dead; one of our old Acquaintance; and to hear from him the Relation of what happened to him after Death, and of what he had seen and experienced in the other World? And yet this Evidence, our Saviour tells us, would have no Effect upon an Unbeliever: He, who can hold out against the Evidence that God has already given that he will one Day judge the World in Righteousness, *would not be persuaded, though one rose from the Dead.*

Our Saviour does not deny the Coming of one from the Dead to be an Evidence of a future State; nor yet, allowing it to be an Evidence, does he determine of what Weight and Authority it is, or ought to be. This only he affirms; That, let the Authority of it be what it will, they who will not submit to the Authority of a divine Revelation, will not submit to this: The Reason of which Judgment may appear from the following Considerations:

First, If the Evidence of Revelation be in itself greater and more convincing than the Evidence given by one from the Dead can possibly be, then there is no Reason to expect that he who rejects the greater should submit to the less Authority.

Secondly, If the Objections which the Unbeliever makes use of against the Authority of Revelation, lie stronger against the Authority of one coming from the Dead, it is not to be supposed, that he will pass over that

that in one Case, which he so mightily stumbles at in the other. Or,

Thirdly, If Unbelief be the Effect of a vitiated and corrupted Mind, which hates to be reformed; which rejects the Evidence, because it will not admit the Doctrine, not the Doctrine, because it cannot admit the Evidence; in this Case all Proofs will be alike, and it will be lost Labour to ply such a Man with Reason or new Evidence, since it is not want of Reason or Evidence that makes him an Unbeliever. And it is upon this Case chiefly that our Saviour grounds his Judgment in the Text.

First then, Let us consider, whether the Evidence upon which Revelation stands be in itself greater or more convincing, than the Evidence of one coming from the Dead can be: If it is, we must subscribe to our Saviour's Judgment; That he *who will not hear Moses and the Prophets, or Christ and his Apostles, would not be persuaded, though one rose from the Dead.* Whatever a dead Man, who appears to you, may tell you concerning another World, all the Reason you can have to believe him is, because you suppose him to come from the other World, and to relate Things which he has seen and known: So that his Authority is no more than barely the Authority of a Traveller, who relates Things of the Countries through which he has passed. And how will it appear to you, that one from the Dead cannot possibly deceive you? As he is a Man, I am sure you have Reason to mistrust him; and what Reason you have to rely on him as a dead Man, I know not. Possibly you may think that the very Seeing of one come from the Dead will of itself prove the great Point of all, the Reality of a future State. But are you sure it is impossible for any Being of the other World to personate a dead Man, and to appear
to

to you in the Shape and Figure of one you formerly knew? Surely, it is one Thing to prove that there is another World, and Beings belonging to it; and another to prove a future State, that is, a World in which dead Men shall live.

Our Saviour's Resurrection was something more than merely the Apparition of a dead Man: He foretold the Time and Circumstances of his Resurrection, and put the Proof of his Mission and Doctrine upon the Performance of this great Wonder: So that by this means his Resurrection became a direct Proof of this, That the Doctrine he taught was the Doctrine of Him who has Power to raise the Dead: And since Part of his Doctrine is, That the Dead shall be raised; we are thus far certain, that He, who has Power to raise the Dead, has assured us that the Dead shall be raised: For no one can foretel the Time and Circumstances of a dead Man's rising to Life, who has not the Power, or is not commissioned by Him who has the Power, of Life and Death. So that the Authority of our Saviour's Word after his Resurrection was not barely the Authority of one coming from the Dead, but it was the Authority of Him who has Power to raise the Dead; which Authority we know belongs not to Man, and therefore is greater than the Authority of any Man either from the Dead or the Living. So that our Saviour's Resurrection proves a Commission from the Highest Power to teach the World; which cannot be proved merely from the Appearance of one from the Dead. And here lies the true Difference between the Resurrection of Christ, and the Resurrection of those whom our Saviour himself raised from the Dead. We have been asked, why *Lazarus* and the rest did not publish their Knowledge of the other World? One plain Answer is, they were not commissioned so to do:

Their

Their Resurrection was a Proof of his Power and Commission, who raised them to Life, but of their own Power and Commission it was no Proof: They were merely passive in their Resurrection, and brought no more Authority from the Grave, than they carried to it; and therefore had no Right to set up for Teachers.

Then, as to the Reality of our Saviour's Resurrection, there was Warning given to expect it; which of itself is a great Evidence of sincere Dealing, Men do not use to give public Notice of the Cheats they intend to play; or, if ever they have, the Success has been answerable to the Management, and yielded nothing but Shame and Confusion to the Contrivers. And, after his Resurrection, his Stay upon Earth was so long, as to give full Satisfaction, to all concerned, of the Truth and Reality of what they saw. At his first Appearance, the Disciples were in the same Case with others who think they see Spectres and Apparitions; that is, they were confounded and amazed, and did not know well what they saw: And, had not the Frequency of our Saviour's Appearances made them familiar to them, so that they bore the Sight of him with the same Sedateness of Mind as they did in his Life-time, and consequently had all the necessary Qualifications to judge rightly concerning what they heard or saw; had it not been for this, I say, their Evidence in this Case would not have been equal to the Weight of those Truths it is to support. And farther, since this Appearance was in consequence of the Prediction he made of his own Resurrection, there is no room to doubt that it was a true and proper Resurrection of his Body: For it is much easier to imagine that he should come to Life, and fulfil his Prediction, than that he should, being really dead, contrive and execute any thing that should seem to fulfil it.

Possibly

Possibly this may be allowed, and yet not give Satisfaction in this Matter: For it is not, you will say, that the Resurrection of our Saviour is such a Work as is not proper to satisfy all Doubts, that makes you desire to see one from the Dead; but it is, that you would willingly be satisfied by your own Eyes, and not depend upon the Credit of another for a Thing of this Nature: Had you been in the Place of the Apostles, and seen our Lord come from the Grave, that then you would not have desired to have seen any body else; but now you think you might find that Conviction in seeing one come from the Dead yourself, which you cannot find in the Reports of those who pretend to have seen one.

Let us consider this Case then: Whether he who believes upon the Credit of a private Apparition to himself, believes upon a surer Evidence, than he who receives the Gospel Account upon that Evidence on which it at present stands. I will not deny but that a Man's Fancy may be more powerfully wrought on, not only by seeing, but even by supposing that he sees, one from the Dead: But this is so far from being an Advantage, that in truth it is quite otherwise; for, the more Work Things of this Nature find for the Imagination, the less Room do they leave for the Judgment to exercise itself in. Our Senses at all times are liable to be imposed on, but never more than when we are in a Fright or Surprise. In such Cases it is common to overlook our Friends, and not to know who was with us, or who not: And the very Surprise, that would necessarily attend upon seeing one come from the Dead, would be a great Reason for us to suspect afterwards the Report our Senses made of what they had seen. And this was indeed the Case of those who saw our Saviour upon his first Appearance: Nor
could

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could any thing have cured this, but his staying with them so long as he did; so that at last they were able to see him without being disturbed, or suffering any Alteration in their usual Temper: And this qualified them to judge for themselves, and report to others with Authority what they saw. So that the Circumstances of our Saviour's Resurrection were such as admitted a due Testimony; whereas it is very much to be doubted, whether he who sees one come from the Dead be capable to give himself Satisfaction afterwards, either as to what he saw, or what he heard. And judge you, whether you would chuse to believe the concurring Testimony of many Persons in their right Senses, so well qualified to judge, or rely upon yourself, at a Time when you are hardly Master of your Senses.

But farther; Suppose you could converse with a Man from the Dead with the same Temper and Calmness, that you do with one of your Friends or Acquaintance; what would be the Consequence? You would probably rest assured that you had seen a Man from the Dead, and perhaps be more satisfied of this, than at present you are that the Disciples saw Christ after his Death. Allowing this, what follows? The Question is not, whether he that sees a Man come from the Dead, may be sure he sees a Man come from the Dead; but whether he has a better Foundation for Faith and Religion, than the present Revelation affords? This is what our Saviour affirms: *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the Dead.* The same Reasons, that move you to reject the Authority of Christ and his Apostles, would move you to reject the Authority of your new Acquaintance from the Dead: Which will appear by considering,

Secondly, That the Objections which Unbelievers urge against the Authority of Revelation, will lie stronger

stronger against the Authority of one coming from the Dead: For, first, as to the Nature of this Sort of Evidence, if it be any Evidence at all, it is a Revelation: And therefore whatever has been said against the Authority of Revelation will be applicable to this Kind of it: And, consequently, those who, upon the foot of Natural Religion, stand out against the Doctrine of the Gospel, would much more stand out against the Authority of one coming from the Dead. And whether it would weigh more with the Atheist, let any one consider: For no Revelation can weigh with him; for the Being of God, which he disbelieves, is supported with greater Arguments, and greater Works, than any Revelation can be: And therefore, standing out against the Evidence of all Nature, speaking in the wonderful Works of the Creation, he can never reasonably submit to a less Evidence. Let then one from the Dead appear to him; and he will, and certainly may, as easily account for one dead Man's recovering Life and Motion, as he does for the Life and Motion of so many Men, whom he sees every Day. Is it not as hard, do you think, to make a Man at first, and breathe into him the Breath of Life, as it is to make him up again, after he has once been dead? And therefore he that can satisfy himself as to the first, need not be troubled about the last. For I am sure the Appearance of a dead Man could never teach the Atheist, upon his own Principles, to reason himself into the Belief of a Deity, though possibly it might scare him into it: Which is too low a Design for the Providence of God to be concerned in, and therefore can never be a Reason for his giving this sort of Evidence to Mankind.

But farther; Let us suppose a Man free from all these Prejudices, and then see what we can make of this Evidence. If a dead Man should come to you,
you

you must suppose either that he speaks from himself, and that his Errand to you is the Effect of his own private Affection for you, or that he comes by Commission and Authority from God. As to the first Case, you have but the Word of a Man for all you hear: And how will you prove that a dead Man is incapable of practising a Cheat upon you? Or, allowing the Appearance to be real, and the Design honest, do you think every dead Man knows the Counsels of God, and his Will with respect to his Creatures here on Earth? If you do not think this, and I cannot see possibly how you should think it, what Use will you make of this kind of Revelation? Should he tell you that the Christian Faith is the true Faith, the Way to Heaven and Happiness, and that God will reward all true Believers; you would have much less Reason to believe him, than now you have to believe Christ and his Apostles: And therefore, if you reject Christ and his Apostles, neither can this new Evidence prevail with you: For, suppose that a Man from the Dead should presume to teach you a new Religion, to instruct you in new Rites and Ceremonies, to institute new Sacrifices and Oblations; would you think yourself warranted by a sufficient Authority to do and practise as he taught you? Would you not require better Evidence of his knowing the Will of God, than merely seeing him come from the Dead? And yet this is the Case: Should an Unbeliever receive the Gospel upon such Evidence, he receives a new Religion; for to an Unbeliever it is new, and the whole Weight of his Faith must rest upon the Credit and Authority of this Man from the Dead; and it would be as reasonable for an Unbeliever to receive a perfectly new Doctrine upon this Authority, as to receive an old one, which he before disbelieved. But, on the other
side,

side, should you suppose this Man to come by the particular Order and Appointment of God, and consequently that what he says is the Word and Command of God; you must then be prepared to answer such Objections, as you are now ready to make against the Mission and Authority of Christ and his Apostles. First then we ask, how this Commission appears? If you say, because he comes from the Dead, we cannot rest here; because it is not self-evident, that all who come from the Dead are inspired: And yet farther than this you cannot go; for it is not supposed that your Man from the Dead works Miracles. The Mission of Christ we prove by Prophecies, and their Completion; by the Signs and Wonders he wrought by the Hand of God; by his Resurrection, which includes both Kinds, being in itself a great Miracle, and likewise the Completion of a Prophecy: Which Circumstance, as was before observed, adds great Weight to his Authority. Besides, we are often urged to shew, that the Authors of our Religion were free from Interest and Design, and that our Faith is not founded in the Politics of cunning and artificial Men; and we must desire you to do the same good Office for the Prophet who comes from the Dead. As for ourselves, we appeal to the known History of those who were Founders of our Religion: There you may find them *persecuted, afflicted, and tormented*: Their Gain was Misery; their Recompence, Hatred from the World; and their End, in the Eyes of Men, was Destruction. These are the Proofs of their worldly Cunning and Policy, and the Results of their deep-laid Designs. But how will you support the suspected Credit of one from the Dead? He comes, and tells his Story, goes off, and there is an end of him: And unless you can prove there are no evil Spirits, or no evil Men dead, you cannot clear him
from

from the Suspicion, nor fathom the Depth of his Design: He appears to you like the Wind, the Sound of which you hear; but whence it comes, or whither it goes, you know not. If you will listen to the Evidences of the Gospel, we will shew you in whom we have believed; we will shew you Men like ourselves, armed with the Power of God, with Innocence of Life, with Patience in all manner of Affliction, and at last sealing with their Blood the Truth of their Mission. But, if you cannot digest this Evidence, in vain do you call out for Help from the other World; for neither *would you be persuaded, though one rose from the Dead.* And this will farther appear,

Thirdly, By considering the Temper of Infidelity: For where Unbelief proceeds, as generally it does, from a vitiated and corrupted Mind, which hates to be reformed; which rejects the Evidence, because it will not admit the Doctrine, not the Doctrine, because it cannot admit the Evidence; in this Case all Proofs will be alike, and it will be lost Labour to ply such a Man with Reason or new Evidence, since it is not Want of Reason or Evidence that makes him an Unbeliever. And this Case chiefly our Saviour seems to have in his View; for the Request to *Abraham* to send one from the Dead was made in behalf of Men who lived wantonly and luxuriously; who, as the Psalmist expresses it, *had not God in all their Thoughts.* The rich Man in Torment could think of no better Expedient to rescue his Brethren from the Danger they were in of coming into the same Condition with himself, than sending one from the Dead to admonish them, and to give them a faithful Account how Matters stood there, and how it fared with him. To which *Abraham* answers, that they had already sufficient Evidence of these Things; that they wanted no Means of

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Knowledge, if they would make use of those they had: *They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them.* But still he insists, *Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the Dead, they will repent.* Then follows the Text, which is the last Resolution of this Case, *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the Dead.* And indeed, where Infidelity is the Effect of such profligate Wickedness, it deserves not so much Regard from God, as that he should condescend to make particular Applications to it by new Lights and Evidences: And should he do it, there is Reason to suspect it would be ineffectual. We see, in the ordinary Course of Providence, many Judgments bestowed upon Sinners to reclaim and amend them; but they harden themselves against them; so that their last State is worse than their first. I will not answer for the Courage of Sinners, how well they would bear the Sight of one from the Dead; nay, I am apt to imagine it would strangely terrify and amaze them. But to be frightened and to be persuaded are two things: Nature would recover the Fright, and Sin would recover Strength, and the great Fright might come to be matter of Ridicule. How easy would it be, when the Fright was over, to compare this Event with the many ridiculous Stories we have of Apparitions, and to come at length to mistrust our own Senses, and to conclude that we were misled, like a Man in a dark Night who follows an *Ignis fatuus*? And, what is worse, when the Infidel had once conquered his own Fears, and got loose again from the Thoughts of Religion, he would then conclude, that all Religion is made up of that Fear which he felt himself, which others cannot get rid of, though he so manfully and happily subdued it. You may think it perhaps impossible, that a Man should not be convinced

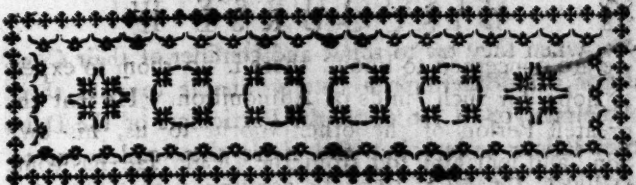
convinced by such an Appearance: The same I believe you would think of the Judgments which befel *Pharaoh*, that it is hardly possible any Man should withstand them; and yet you see he did: Nay, did not the Guards, who were Eye-witnesses of our Saviour's Resurrection; who saw the Angel that rolled away the Stone from the Mouth of the Sepulchre; who shook and trembled with Fear, and became as dead Men; did not they, after all this, receive Money to deny all they saw, and to give false Evidence against the Person they beheld coming from the Grave? So, you see, it is in the Nature of Man to withstand such Evidences, where the Power of Sin is prevalent.

Besides, there are many Sinners, who are not Infidels: They may believe *Moses* and the Prophets, though they will not hear them; that is, obey them. Now should one come from the Dead to these Men, the most they could do would be to believe him: But that does not imply their obeying him; for they believe *Moses* and the Prophets, Christ and his Apostles, and yet obey not them; and why should Obedience be the Consequence of Belief in one Case more than another? There can be no greater Arguments for Obedience than the Gospel affords; and therefore he who believes the Gospel, and disobey it, is out of hope to be reformed by any other Evidence. So that, considering this Case with respect to all manner of Infidels or Sinners, there is Reason in our Saviour's Judgment; *If they will not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the Dead.*

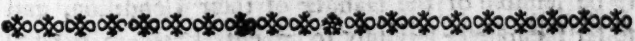
And hence perhaps we may learn the Reason, why this sort of Intercourse between the other World and this is so very rare and uncommon, because it could serve no good End and Purpose; for God having already given a sufficient Evidence of all Things which

we are concerned to know, there is no room to expect or hope for such kinds of Admonition. He sent the greatest Person of the other World to us, his own Son, and sent him too from the Dead: He has come himself down to us in Signs and Wonders and mighty Works: And why he should send a Man from the Dead to tell you, what is legible in the Book of Nature, what He, his Son, his Apostles and Prophets have already told you, you that can give the Reason, give it.



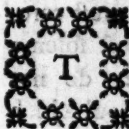


DISCOURSE III.



PSALM XIX. 12.

*Who can understand his Errors? Cleanse thou me
from secret Faults.*

 HE only Method of coming to the distinct Knowledge of our Sins, and to a due Sense of them, is Self-examination; and therefore it is, that you are so frequently exerted to enter into yourselves, to converse with your own Hearts, and to search out the Evil which is in them. But often it happens that this Method, after the sincerest and most laborious Inquiry, leaves Men under great Dissatisfaction of Mind, and subject to the frequent Returns of Doubts and Misgivings of Heart; lest something very bad may have escaped their Search, and, for want of being expiated by Sorrow and Repentance, should remain a Debt upon their Souls at the great Day of Account. As in temporal Concerns, Men often know, that by a long Course of Prodigality, and many expensive Vanities, they have contracted a great Debt upon their Estates, and have brought themselves to the very Brink of Poverty and Distress, and

yet, when they try to think and consider of their Condition, find themselves utterly unable to state their Accounts, or to set forth the Particulars of the Debt they labour under; but the more they endeavour to recollect, the more they are convinced that they are mere Strangers at home, and ignorant of their own Affairs: So in spiritual Concerns likewise, Men who have been long acquainted with Vice, and long Strangers to Thought and Reflection, when they come to be sensible of the Danger of their Condition, and to set themselves seriously to repent, know in general that they have a heavy Weight of Sin and Guilt upon their Souls; but yet the Particulars, though many and heinous, which they are able to recollect and charge themselves with distinctly, fall very short of the Sense they have of their Condition, and do by no means fill up that which they know to be the Measure of their Iniquities. And hence it is, that after the most careful Examination of themselves, and the most solemn Repentance for all their known Sins, they do not always enjoy that Peace and Tranquillity of Soul which they expected, and had promised themselves, as the blessed Fruits of Contrition; but suffer extremely under uncertain Hopes and Fears, not being able to satisfy themselves that their Repentance was perfect, which they know was formed upon a Knowledge of their Sins that was very imperfect.

The holy Psalmist had this Sense of his Condition, and felt how unable he was sufficiently to acknowledge his own Guilt before God, when he broke forth into the Complaint with which the Text begins, *Who can understand his Errors?* or, as it runs in the Translation which is more familiar to us, *Who can tell how oft he offendeth?* In this Distress his only Refuge was to the Mercy

Mercy of God, confessing, with the greatest Humility of Heart, that his Transgressions were not only more than he could bear, but even more than he could understand; *Cleanse thou me from my secret Faults.* Whenever Men entertain Doubts of their own Sincerity and due Performance of religious Acts, it is extremely difficult to reason with their Fears and Scruples, and to dispossess them of the Misapprehensions they have of their own State and Condition. Such Suggestions as bring Ease and Comfort to their Minds come suspected, as proceeding from their own or their Friends Partiality; and they are afraid to hope, lest even to hope, in their deplorable Condition, should prove to be Presumption, and assuming to themselves more than in Reason or Justice belongs to them. But when we can shew them Men of approved Virtue and Holiness, whose Praise is in the Book of Life, who have struggled with the same Fears, and waded through even the worst of their Apprehensions to the peaceful Fruits of Righteousness; it helps to quicken both their Spirits and their Understanding, and at once to administer Knowledge and Consolation. And for this Reason we can never sufficiently admire the Wisdom of God, in setting before us the Examples of good Men in their lowest and most imperfect State. Had they been shewn to us only in the brightest Part of their Character, Despair of attaining to their Perfection might incline us to give over the Pursuit, by throwing a Damp upon our best Resolutions: But when we see them rising to Virtue and Holiness from the same wretched Condition which we are in, and labouring under the same Difficulties, the same Anxieties, and Torments of Mind; when we see their very Souls convulsed with the Pangs of Repentance, and their Faith almost sinking under the Doubt-

fulness of their Condition; when we hear them cry to God in the Words of Anguish, not knowing how to pray, or in what Terms to lament their Sins; when we see this Nakedness of their Souls, and find that they are like one of us, what secret Comfort must it give to an afflicted Spirit, what Support to a Mind oppressed with the Sense of Guilt, to find in these great Examples, what heavenly Joy and Peace often spring from the lowest Depths of Sorrow and Woe!

And there is indeed, with respect to the Comfort and Security of a Sinner, a great Difference between Arguments drawn from general Reasonings and Reflections, and those which are suggested from the Experience and Practice of holy Men. In the Case before us, if we consider the Words of the Text without Regard had to the Person who spoke them, we may raise many Reflections from the great Variety of human Actions, and the complicated Nature of them, from the Short-sightedness of the Understanding, and the Weakness and Imperfection of the Faculties, to shew how very hard it is, and almost impossible, for any one perfectly to understand his Errors: Whence might be deduced the Reasonableness of the Petition, *Cleanse thou me from secret Faults*; because where we cannot in particular recollect, we can only in general lament, our Iniquities: Beyond this Probability we cannot go to determine the Method in which God will deal with Sinners. But take the Words as spoken by *David*, of the Sincerity of whose Repentance, and the Acceptance of it with God, we nothing doubt, and the Conclusions will be much fuller, and such as cannot fail to refresh the Soul of every languishing Penitent; for in this View the Words fairly afford us these two Propositions:

First,

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First, That the Security and Efficacy of Repentance, do not depend upon a particular Recollection of all our Errors.

Secondly, That for such Errors as we cannot recollect, a general Confession and Repentance are full and sufficient.

These two Propositions contain the plain Doctrine of the Text; so plain, that I need not spend your Time in enlarging upon it. But that we may not mistake in the Application of it to ourselves, and hope for Forgiveness whilst we are willingly ignorant of our Sins, and, to save the Trouble and Pain of Recollection, endeavour to cover them all under general Ejaculations and Petitions for Mercy; I beg your Patience, whilst I set before you of what kind and nature the Sins are, which we may justly call our secret Sins, and for the Expiation of which a general Confession and Repentance will be accepted.

And, first, we may reckon among our secret Sins those which our Liturgy has taught us to ask Repentance and Forgiveness for, under the general Names of Negligences and Ignorances. For Neglect of our Duty, and Negligence in discharging it, are two things; the one arising from a Dislike and Aversion to the Work, and attended with a Consciousness and Consent of Mind; the other proceeding commonly from want of Thought, or want of Disposition, two Infirmities which we care not to accuse ourselves of, and yet from which we are seldom free: Insomuch that, when we think ourselves most secure of a good Disposition and firm Resolution to go through the Business of our Duty, they often forsake us in the midst of our Work, and we find ourselves on a sudden becalmed, our Inclinations grown faint and languid, and too sick

of the Employment to support us in the Prosecution of it.

Such Surprizes good Men have frequently complained of in their Devotions : They set out with Zeal and Fervency of Spirit, with Eyes and Hearts up-listed to God, till some chance Object diverts the Eyes, some favourite Care steals into the Heart, and they both wander and are lost in the Multiplicity of Objects and Imaginations which succeed each other; and when their Thoughts return to the proper Object, they are as one that awaketh from a Dream. Offences of this kind are secret to us even whilst they are committing, the Mind not being conscious to the Delusion; and yet they are so frequent in every Part of our Duty, that when we call ourselves to the strictest Account, it is impossible to find their Number, or to bring every single Act to our Remembrance.

Secondly, Sins of Ignorance are secret Sins likewise, as the very Name they are distinguished by imports. *Where there is no Law, says the Apostle, there is no Transgression;* and therefore unavoidable Ignorance seems to be rather a Misfortune than a Crime; and though it be dumb, and cannot speak in its own Defence, yet its very Silence will be a stronger Plea in the Presence of the Almighty, than all the laboured Excuses which the Wit of knowing Sinners has invented. In all Cases where Men may be said to offend through Ignorance, they must be equally insensible of the Crimes they commit, and the Ignorance they labour under; and therefore equally incapable of repenting particularly of their Sins, and of their Ignorance. For when Men venture boldly upon Actions, being conscious to themselves that they know not whether they are going right or wrong, their Sin is Presumption,

tion, and not Ignorance; and should they chance to blunder into the right Way, it is much to be doubted, whether the Happiness of their Mistake will excuse the Rashness of their Attempts. Such Repentance therefore as this must be numbered, not with our secret Faults, but with such Sins, as, being acted with Conscientiousness and Consent, carry in them an avowed Contempt of the Majesty and Authority of God: For, if a Man thinks Virtue and Vice so indifferent, that he may venture to chuse blindfold which to follow, there wants no better Evidence, that his Heart is not right with God, who can with so much Coolness and Temper affront his Honour.

But though the Ignorance itself be presumptuous, and is such as, being conscious to, we must certainly be accountable for; yet the Mistakes, the Follies, the Sins it leads us to, may be unknown to us, both at the Time of our offending, and of our repenting: And whatever Aggravation they receive from the obstinate Ignorance they proceed from; how much soever the Heinousness of them may deserve to be distinguished in our Sorrow and Contrition; yet, since the Mind cannot reach the Knowledge of them, they can only be lamented under the general Character of secret Sins. Nor is this the only Case in which our Sins partake of the Malice of the Will, and yet escape the Notice of the Understanding: For,

Thirdly, Nothing shews more the Corruption of the Will, or Disinclination of the Heart to Virtue, than confirmed Customs and Habits of sinning; and yet in this Perfection of Vice we lose the very Sense and Feeling of Sin. Habits grow from often-repeated Actions; and, though at first they require distinct Acts of the Will to give them Being, yet at last we grow
so

so perfect, so ready at the Work, as not to want the Authority and Consent of the Mind: As Servants, who, by being often told their Masters Work, at last fall into the Road of their Business without being called on, and yet act as much under the Direction of their Masters Will, as when they were under their daily or hourly Instruction. And so it is in Habits: The Mind, which is the governing Principle, lies by, and the Work goes on without being attended to. Of many Instances give me leave only to mention one, which shall be that of common Swearers, and Blasphemers of the Holy Name: A Vice in itself so prodigious, that no Aggravation can heighten it, no Excuse can lessen it! And yet these who are most guilty of this Sin are least sensible of it: It is so familiar to them, that they are not conscious when they offend: Blaspheming is their Idiom, a Turn in their way of speaking, and Oaths the mere Expletives of their Language. And when every sober Heart trembles to hear what they utter, they only are unconcerned, as only being ignorant of the accursed Malice with which they defy the living God. For all these Things God will call Sinners into Judgment; in his Book they are noted down: But yet, when Sinners call themselves to Judgment, they only can tell that they have grievously offended; the Measure of their Iniquity they know not, nor the many Aggravations of it: And therefore the utmost that the sincerest Penitent can do, is to lament the Offences of his Heart and Tongue, which he is not able to remember, and to pray to God that he likewise will be pleased to blot out the Remembrance of his Iniquities.

Fourthly, The Apostle has advised us *not to be Partakers of other Men's Sins*; which shews, that when others

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others sin, being led to it by our Influence, Example, or Encouragement; we share with them in the Guilt of their Iniquity. How far our Influence spreads, to what Instances, and what Degrees of Vice, how many we seduced by our Example; or hardened by our Encouragement, is more than we can tell; and yet not more than we shall answer for. Those who are thus entered in our Service, and sin under our Conduct, are but our Factors: They trade for us, as well as for themselves; and whatever their Earnings are, we shall receive our due Proportion out of the Wages of their Sin. This is a Guilt which steals upon us without being perceived; it grows whilst we sleep, and is loading our Account even when our Bodies are in the Possession of the Grave. The higher our Station, and the greater our Authority, the more Reason have we to fear being involved in this kind of Guilt; because in proportion to our Authority will the Infection of our Example spread; and, as our Power is great, our Encouragement will be the more effectual; and some perhaps there may be, who shall appear not only for their own Sins, but for the Wickedness of the Age they lived in. But then, on the other side, (pardon me a small Digression) Power, and Honour, and Riches, are great Means of Salvation in the Hands of a wise Man, who knows how to use them to the Glory of God, and the Good of Mankind. To him shall be added the Virtue and Religion which grow up under his Influence and Protection: And how transporting will the Surprise be to such happy Souls, when they shall find the Improvement of this and future Ages in religious Holiness placed to their Account at the great Day, as being the genuine Offspring of their Care and Solitude, and unshaken Fidelity in the Cause of God, and of his Christ!

Fifthly,

Fifthly, The great Measure of Folly and Vanity and Self-love there is in the best of our Actions is what seldom falls under our Notice; and yet from such secret Errors who is free? We hardly know our own Hearts well enough to answer at all Times for the Integrity of our Intentions. How much of our Virtue and Religion is mere Respect to common Decency, and arises from no higher Spring than a Regard to our own Credit and Reputation, is more than we can certainly tell. When we are most eager in pursuit of some good End, could we stop short, and examine ourselves fairly, we should find perhaps that we were only gratifying some private Passion, and that none of the best, perhaps Malice and Revenge, or some other inordinate Desire.

To this Account we may add the many vain Imaginations which are conceived in the Heart, though never brought to Life by Action, but die in the Womb, and are out of Remembrance. Such are the ambitious Man's imaginary Scenes of Honour and Glory, formed and wrought up to a kind of Life in a mere Delusion of Thought; which, fantastical as they are in themselves, do arise from real Pride and Vanity. Such the visionary Enjoyment of sensual Men, when the Thoughts traverse all the forbidden Paths of Luxury and Wantonness; where, though the Phantom be airy and bodiless, yet does this Dream of Sensuality derive itself from no imaginary Corruption, but from a real Distemper in the Mind, from inordinate Desires and Affections. Such is the secret Anger, such the Malice of the Heart, which sits brooding over envious or revengeful Designs, which it contrives within itself, and seems to execute upon its Enemies; and, for want of Power or Opportunity for real Revenge, feeds itself with viewing the Execution of its Wrath, though only expressed

expressed in the Images of Fancy. Harmless and innocent as this Revenge may seem, which spends itself in imaginary Mischief only, yet it springs from the Root of Bitterness, and is too plain an Evidence that we hate one another.

Lastly, When we come to repent of our Sins, many of them may be secret to us merely through the Weakness and Imperfection of the Memory, which cannot recollect all the various Passages of a vicious Life. These Sins, however conscious we have been of them heretofore, with respect to our Repentance are as secret as if we had never known them, and can only be confessed and bewailed in general Terms.

Thus have I set before you the several Kinds of our secret Sins. One general Character there is which belongs to them all, namely, that they are such as we cannot, not such as we will not remember: For tho' the Mercy of God will cover our Defects, when they are unavoidable, and such as arise from our natural Weakness and Infirmary; yet we have no Reason to expect any Allowance, where we are wanting to ourselves through Laziness and Indisposition; where, to avoid the Trouble or the Anguish of Repentance, we cover our own Sins deceitfully. Such Hypocrisy will be no Plea in His Presence, *who trieth the Heart and Reins, and spieth out all our Ways.* But,

Secondly, We are to consider what Guilt we contract by our secret Sins, lest it should be thought that the Sins which escape our Knowledge ought not to burden our Conscience. Where there is no Guilt, there needs no Remission; and if we cannot in Justice be charged with our secret Sins, there is no Sense in the Psalmist's Petition, *Cleanse thou me from secret Faults.* In another place he has told us, *That God sets our Iniquities before him, and our secret Sins in the Light*

Light of his Countenance: And the Day approaches, when for all these things he will call us into Judgment.

In the Instances already set before you, you may observe, that our most secret Sins are sometimes the most heinous. Thus it is in the Case of habitual Sins; we are too well acquainted with them to take particular Notice of them; they are the involuntary Motions of a second Nature, and we are as little concerned to count their Number, as we are the Beatings of our Pulse. But shall this plead their Excuse? Shall only fearful Sinners and modest Beginners be punished? and shall the Height of Iniquity, because it takes away all Shame and Sense of Sin, take away likewise all Danger of Judgment? This can agree with no Rule of Justice or Equity; for by this means the same Man will stand chargeable with the Guilt of his early Sins, such as he committed before his Conscience was quite hardened, and yet not accountable for the more enormous Crimes of sinful Wickedness: As if the only Sin we could commit, were to be sensible of our Faults.

The same might be made appear in the other Instances: For every *idle Word*, how soon soever it slips out of our Memory, for every vain Imagination of the Heart, how soon soever it vanishes away, we shall *give an Account at the Day of Judgment*. For the Guilt of Sin does not arise from the Power of our Memory, nor is it extinguished by the Weakness of it: If it were, Forgetfulness would be the surest Repentance; and want of Thought and Reflection, which is so often represented in Scripture as the Aggravation of Sin, would be the Sinner's best Security. But, alas! tho' we forget, there is One who cannot, before whom our Iniquities are ever present; who will enter into Judgment with us, as well for the Sins which we cannot remember, as for those we cannot forget.

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The Consequence from the whole is this: That since many of our Sins are secret to us, they can only be repented of in general; and since many of our secret Sins are very heinous, they must seriously and solemnly be repented of. By general Repentance you are not to understand then a slight or superficial Repentance only. The Petition of the Psalmist, *Cleanse thou me from secret Faults*, proceeded from a Heart deeply affected with the Sense of its Guilt, and does not express the Sentiments of one who was excusing or lessening his Faults; for he remembered, and so must we, that secret as our Faults are, yet God has placed them *in the Light of his Countenance*.



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DISCOURSE IV.



PART I.



MATTHEW xii. 36.

But I say unto you, that every idle Word that Men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the Day of Judgment.

T is very evident from the Context, that our Saviour's Intention was to distinguish between the heinous Offences of Blasphemy, Perjury, and the like, and the idle Words mentioned in the Text, as I shall have Occasion to observe. We must therefore look among the more common and less crying Sins of Speech, to know what kind of Words they are, which our Saviour threatens with an Account at the Day of Judgment. Of these there are many sorts:

First, Idle Words may denote Words which proceed either from the Vanity or the Deceitfulness of Men's Minds; and this Sense will take in all the empty Boastings and great Pretences of Vanity and Pride,
and

and all the sly Insinuations of Craft and Hypocrisy; and there is no Doubt to be made, but that Men shall be accountable for Words of this kind at the Day of Judgment.

Secondly, Idle Words may comprehend the Reports which proceed oftentimes from mere Curiosity, and a Desire of hearing and telling News, by which our Neighbour suffers in his Credit or Reputation; and questionless these Words will be also remembered in the Day of the Lord.

Thirdly, Idle Words may imply such Words as are the impure Conceptions of a polluted Mind, which often pass for Wit and Entertainment among those who have learned to make a mock of Sin. Under this Head will be comprehended the Filthiness and foolish Talking and Jestings, which the Apostle to the Ephesians would not have so much as once named among Christians.

Lastly, Idle Words may signify useless and insignificant Words. This Sense will comprehend a great Part of the Conversation of the World, which aims at nothing but present Amusements; as if it were the Business of a rational Creature to divert his Mind from Thought and Reflection. How far Words of this kind, when attended with no other Evil, may expose a Man to Guilt, is not easily discerned; though I think it is evident at least, that a Man may spend so much of his Time in idle or unprofitable Words, as to render himself obnoxious to an Account for the Misuse and Misapplication of the Reason and Speech with which his Maker has endowed him.

These are the common Sins of Speech, which are comprehended under the general Term of *idle Words*, which, if persisted in, may prove of dangerous Consequence to our Souls; for of every idle Word we speak we must give Account thereof in the Day of Judgment.

What.

What these Sins are, I shall endeavour to represent to you in the following Discourse, under the several Heads already mentioned.

And, First, By *idle Words* we may understand such Words as proceed generally from Vanity or Deceit, which will comprehend the Pretences and plausible Speeches of the Cunning, and the empty Boastings of the vain-glorious Man. In both these Cases there is a want of Truth, upon which we ought to build whatever we say one to another. Truth and Falshood have the Relation to each other of Good and Evil; and this is an essential Difference, as we may learn from hence, that Truth is the Attribute of God, and consequently an essential Good, and its Opposite, Falshood, must be likewise an essential Evil; so that there always is Evil where there is not Truth. Truth likewise is a Part of natural Justice which we owe to one another; for whenever we lye to our Neighbour, we lead him into wrong Notions either of Persons or Things; and Mistakes in either kind may prove prejudicial to him: So that to speak Truth to our Neighbour is a Branch of that Justice by which we are obliged to do no Man any Wrong.

I know many nice Cases have been put upon this Question, Whether we are always obliged to speak Truth? And though some have maintained, that Truth may be dispensed with, when it is evidently for our Friend's or Neighbour's Benefit, that he should be kept in Ignorance; yet it never was pretended, that Vanity or Cunning were sufficient Excuses for the want of Truth.

Our Saviour tells us, that evil things proceed from an evil Heart. Now the Evil that lies at the Heart of the vain-glorious Man is Pride: He would fain appear to be something considerable, and make a

Figure;

Figure; and therefore Truth shall never stop him from setting himself out, and ascribing to himself such Honours or Riches, such Wit or Courage, as he thinks may merit Worship and Respect in the World.

There is no Attempt that Men are more generally unsuccessful in, than in this of praising and extolling themselves. It is an headstrong Vanity, that will not be confined to the prudent Methods of Hypocrisy and Dissimulation; but shews itself so openly, as hardly ever to escape being discovered, and consequently seldom fails of reaping the Fruit it justly deserves, which is Scorn and Contempt. And yet, in spite of the Sin and Folly and Disappointment that attend upon it, Pride will have its Work; and where-ever this Evil has rooted in the Heart, it will produce Sin and Folly in the Mouth, such Sin and Folly as shall be remembered at the Day of Judgment. For the Romances that Pride and Vain-glory lead Men to are capable of no Excuse; and therefore Offenders of this kind must stand liable to all the Threatenings, which are denounced against those who take Pleasure in a Lye.

But Vanity may sometimes be the Vice of Men otherwise good and virtuous; and though they will not lye to gratify their Humour, yet they will be very ready to do themselves Justice upon all Occasions, and set forth the Good they are conscious of in themselves to the best Advantage. But even these are *idle Words*, and Men must answer for the Praise and Glory they assume to themselves. Besides, it is almost impossible to speak of ourselves and our own Works with Pleasure, and to keep within the Bounds of Modesty and Discretion, and not to expose the Good we have done to be ridiculed and evil-spoken of by those who observe our Vanity and Weakness.

It is dangerous at all times to speak of ourselves: If we have done ill, either to excuse or deny it inflames the Account; if we have done well, our Saviour tells us that we must nevertheless call ourselves *unprofitable Servants*: And whether this Rule be observed by those who boast, and are always talking of the Good they do, let any Man judge. Our Saviour's Advice about Charity holds in all other Cases of the like Nature; *our left Hand must not know the Charity our right Hand does*; and whatever else we do that may seem good in our own Eyes should at least be kept from our Tongue's End, for fear we should be found in the Number of those, who take to themselves the Praise that is due to God alone.

One aukward Way that some Men have of letting others know what Good they have done, is by perpetually lessening and discommending in themselves what, in their private Thoughts, they think others ought to admire. But there is little Difference between Pride and affected Humility; and whenever Men delight to talk of themselves, it is to be suspected that Pride and Vanity direct them to the Choice of the Subject, though it may appear perhaps in the Disguise of Meekness and Humility. If you think that you have done nothing worthy of Praise or Admiration, whence arises your Jealousy that the World should overvalue you? And why all this Care to lessen and debase yourself, unless you are conscious to yourself of something that in Reason you judge ought to exalt you? If you labour to shun the Praise of Men, it is plain you think you have deserved it, and your pretended Humility is the genuine Offspring of Pride and Vain-glory: For Humility will no more make a Shew of itself than of other Virtues; and, where Men are truly humble, they will not tell all the World of it; and therefore

therefore where they take Delight in industriously undervaluing themselves, it can proceed from nothing but their Desire of being thought humble: But to affect even the Praise of Humility is Pride and Vanity. So then, in respect to this Subject, the Rule of Prudence and the Rule of Virtue are coincident, that the less we talk of ourselves the better: It is a nice Theme, and few enter upon it, who come off clear either of Folly or Sin.

In the next Degree we place Cunning and Artifice, which make Men very forgetful of the Respect that is due to Truth, whilst they direct their Speech to serve and support some End or Design of their own. There are many Degrees of this Cunning: That which is so gross as to aim at making a Prize of the Ignorance of others needs not to be mentioned here. Men of this Principle proceed farther generally than *idle Words*, and are out of the present Subject through an Excess of Lying, and falsifying their Words and Oaths, as may best serve their Purpose.

But the Charge of *idle Words* lies against a Cunning, which is less desperate and malicious, and is the distinguishing Mark of such Men, who deceive you by a Shew of Kindness which is not real. Now the Man who courts and caresses all that come near him must allow himself a great Latitude, since he must often bestow his Smiles on the Person he does not love, and his Compliments on the Person he despises: In both which Cases he stands charged with Falshood and Hypocrisy.

This Man of general Civility and Address destroys the Credit of Language; for his Words have no Meaning; none at least that you can understand: He that says the same Things to every body, must be supposed to mean them of no body. But the Advantage
these

these Men have is from the Folly and Self-love of Mankind; for most People are so well opinionated of themselves, that they cannot think a Man insincere, who commends and extols them: From whence it comes to pass, that a Man will swallow the Compliments, when applied to himself, though they come from a Mouth which he knows makes no Distinctions.

But what Account shall a Man give of himself for living perpetually in a Disguise; for deceiving all about him, and using the Speech, which God gave him for better Purposes, to impose on the Weakness and Folly of Mankind? An Account he must give, unless he can shew the Use and Benefit of his fair Speeches. Say, which is yet more than you can say, that these Words are innocent and harmless: They are at the best then useless and insignificant; and think how your Excuse will sound, when the utmost you will have to say for yourself will be, that you employed the Talent God gave you to no good End or Purpose, only you hope you did no Harm. But add to this, that you deceived the World; that by your servile Compliance you puffed up the Vanity of the Proud, betrayed and exposed the Credulity of the Weak, and possibly too have made a Gain of this Ungodliness; and then I think you need not be told what Sentence a God of Truth, of Righteousness and Justice, will pass against such Deceivers and Liers in wait for Men.

But, Secondly, *Idle Words* may comprehend the Reports of Envy and Malice, by which our Neighbour suffers in his Credit or Reputation.

I would distinguish under this Head between those who invent and contrive wicked Stories and Reports to the Scandal and Defamation of their Neighbour, and those who credulously take up with the Invention,

and report and spread them. To contrive malicious and wicked Stories, and wilfully to defame our Brother, is a Vice that the Text has no Name for; it exceeds all that can be meant by *idle Words*, and must be registered with the other black Crimes, which stand in opposition to the lighter Offences of the Tongue. But even to believe without sufficient Ground, or to report, when we do believe, the Ill we hear of others, cannot be excused of Malice and Envy. It is an old Saying, *Facile credimus quæ volumus*; and if so, to believe the evil Things spoken of our Brother willingly, is a great Mark of an evil Disposition, and shews at least that we should be pleased if they were true. And the Restlessness that some Minds are under, when they have picked up an ill Report, to disburthen themselves, and spread the Story in the Neighbourhood, discovers with what a ready Mind they do this Work and Drudgery of the Devil. But where Men spread Stories of ill Report with Pleasure, and rejoice in the Scandal, they have sucked in with the Story so much of the Contriver's Malice and Envy, that they ought to be ranked with him, and not included under this Subject. M A

But there are others, who, out of an Itch of talking, and knowing other People's Concerns, have their Heads and Tongues perpetually running upon the Affairs and Business of their Neighbours. These People are like the Hawkers in the Street, they disperse whatever comes to their Hand, good or bad; if it be but News, it is all one to them: By which Means they often do a great deal of Mischief without being chargeable with any formed Malice or Design to injure. But in the Multitude of Words there wanteth not Sin; and when Men's Curiosity leads them beyond their proper Sphere and Business, they must answer for the Mischief they do. He who is always talking of what does not
concern

concern him, must needs be guilty of many *idle Words* for which he must answer; and for which he will be less able to answer, if his Words have been prejudicial to the Character or Credit of an innocent Man. You may well be asked, what you had to do to be so very inquisitive and talkative of what no ways belonged to you? The Apostle's Rule is, *that you study to be quiet, and mind your own Business*. But you may farther be asked, how came you to launch so far out of your Knowledge, as to be in Danger of hurting the Interest or good Name of your Brother? It is not enough that you meant no Ill; it ought to be your Care, and Concern, and Study, to do no Ill; and to do what proved ill inadvertently, shews that you were not so studious to avoid the Occasions of Evil; if you had, you would not have ventured where there was such evident Danger of doing Harm, as there always is where Men will talk much of the Affairs and Characters of others. Were it not for such busy, talking Creatures, who listen after all News, it would not be worth a malicious Man's while to invent a Story of his Enemy. A Man cannot carry a Story far himself, nor would he possibly find many openly to abet his Malice in defaming an innocent Man; but there are always inquisitive Busy-bodies, who catch at News, and spread it immediately like Wild-fire: And therefore by being talkative and inquisitive in these Matters, though we acquit you of Malice or ill Design, yet you become the Instrument of Malice; you pull the Trigger, tho' the other levels the Piece at the innocent Head; and since your Curiosity and Impertinence are unjustifiable, you can no ways excuse the Consequences of them. God has provided every Man with Business proper for him to employ his Time in. What you can spare from the necessary Cares of Life, and from the Refreshments and Diversions which Nature requires, is little

enough to lay out upon Eternity, upon the Thoughts of another and better Life; nor are there ever wanting Opportunities of doing good, in which all active Spirits might be usefully employed. How much more innocent and diverting is it to advise and instruct the Ignorant, to rejoice with your Friends in their Good, to comfort and to mourn with them in their Evil; or at least to pass the Time in such Discourses as are administered by innocent Mirth, and friendly Society: How much better, I say, is this, than to sit trying and condemning your Acquaintance, and fetching in all you know by Turns to receive at your Hands their Sentence, not for the Good or Evil which they have done, but for the Good or Evil which you have heard of them? How entertaining soever you may think this Diversion, yet you must remember the Conclusion of the Wise Man's Advice to the Men of Pleasure, *Know, that for all these Things God will bring you into Judgment.*

Thirdly, *Idle Words* may imply such Words as are the Product of a loose and idle Mind, such as represent the impure Conceptions of a Mind polluted with Lust and Lasciviousness. This Notion includes *the Filibines and foolish Talking and Jesting*, which the Apostle forbids *even to be named* among Christians.

There is nothing more directly contrary to Morality and good Manners, than the Liberty which some Men take of entertaining Company upon Subjects, which are unfit for the Mouth or Ears of a Christian. A greater Affront cannot be offered to civil Company than to break in upon their innocent Mirth and Conversation with filthy Jest, which put every modest Person to Pain, and under a Difficulty of behaving himself, whilst such Things are discoursed on: Though it is the Pleasure the lewd Jester delights in to put
Modesty

Modesty out of Countenance, and to set Impudence and Buffoonry in Triumph over it. But whether this be an Employment that even common Sense and Reason should submit to, let every one, who is not quite lost to Shame, determine. It is a great Argument of the Impurity of Men's Minds, when things of this nature lie uppermost, and are ever at their Tongue's End: And therefore for their own Sakes they should confine such Thoughts, unless they take Pleasure in hiding the Man to discover the Brute, and to let the World see what Pains they have taken to furnish their Minds with a Knowledge, which Nature and common Decency have ever strove to conceal.

This impudent Wit is in all Persons abominable, but never more truly infamous than when it is found in the Company of grey Hairs; when Men seem to be feeding upon the Dregs of the Pollutions of their Youth, and entertaining their Minds with Lust and Sensuality, in spite of the Decays of Nature, which call for other Thoughts. I am almost afraid of calling these *idle Words*, because the Expression does not reach to the Heinousness of the Crime: For nothing is more contrary to the Modesty and Purity of our holy Religion, nothing more offensive to God and all virtuous Minds, nothing more destructive of Morality, or that tends more to introduce Looseness and Brutality, than this lewd Wit, which sets at nought every thing that is chaste and pure, whose present Glory is Shame, and whose future Reward shall be Confusion.

If Men have a Knack of cloathing their unchaste Thoughts in cleanly Language, yet it cannot justly be pleaded in Mitigation of their Crime. This possibly may be to sin more like a Gentleman, but it carries an Aggravation with it that cannot easily be forgiven. To improve upon Vice, and to take off that Mark of

Infamy which God has set upon it, is the highest Abuse of your Reason and Sense. To make Lewdness agreeable, to recommend it by an artful Address and a pleasant Wit, what is it but to convey the Poison in a precious Mixture, that may tempt and deceive the Palate to admit the Destruction? Modesty is the Out-guard of Virtue, and gives Notice of the first Approach of Vice; and when Lewdness is so dressed up as to pass unsuspected, it proves but the more dangerous Enemy within: And therefore we must expect to give a severe Account for the Time and Words we spend in this Diversion; and you may imagine how Filthiness and Lewdness shall escape, when God shall sit as Judge, who is all Righteousness and Holiness, and of purer Eyes than to behold Iniquity.

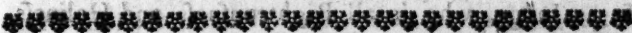




DISCOURSE IV.



PART II.



 FOURTHLY, By *idle Words* we may understand useleſs and inſignificant Words; Words which are ſpent to no great End or Purpoſe either good or bad.

This Senſe will comprehend a great Part of the Converſation of the World, which aims at nothing but preſent Amuſement; and it is worth our while to inquire, what Guilt a Man contracts by theſe *idle Words*. All Words that are in any reſpect injurious to God or Man, or contrary to Truth or good Manners, are out of this Queſtion, which is ſtated upon Words merely impertinent; where the Subject of Diſcourſe is mean and trifling, and not capable of yielding any Profit or Improvement to ourſelves or others. Now to diſcover whether uſeleſs, though innocent Converſation, comes within the Judgment of the Text, we muſt conſider theſe following Particulars:

Fiſt, The Scope of our Saviour's Argument in this Place.

Secondly, The End and Design of Speech, which is the Gift of God to Mankind: For, if we use our Speech to serve any Purpose contrary to the End designed by God in giving us Speech, we manifestly abuse his Gift, and for such Abuse must be answerable.

Thirdly, The Nature of Man in general, and the different Degrees of Sense and Understanding that different Men are endowed with. This Consideration must have place in this Question, because the Tongue cannot speak better than the Understanding can conceive; which infers a Proportion between the Abilities of our Mind, and the Soundness of our Speech; the latter must be judged by the former; for a Man cannot be obliged to utter more Wisdom than God has given him.

First, As to the Scope of our Saviour's Argument: It is evident that he descends from the greater to the less Evils of Speech; from Blasphemy he comes to the other Evils which are generated in the Heart, and from thence derived to the Tongue; *A good Man out of the good Treasure of his Heart bringeth forth good Things, and an evil Man out of the evil Treasure of his Heart bringeth forth evil Things.* What the evil Things are, which are bred in the Heart, our Saviour upon another Occasion tells us; *Out of the Heart proceed evil Thoughts, Murders, Adulteries, Fornications, Thefts, false Witness, Blasphemies.* These then are the evil Things intended. But, as a farther Obligation upon us to keep the Door of our Lips with all Care, our Saviour adds, *But I say unto you, that every idle Word that Men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the Day of Judgment.* Now the Form with which these Words are introduced, looks as if they were intended as an Addition and Improvement to the old Doctrines of the Law. The Jews knew that Perjuries
and

and Blasphemies and false Witness, and the like Crimes, should certainly be punished; and therefore our Saviour only mentions them, without adding expressly, that they should be punished; for that was well known and believed upon the Authority of the Law: But then he adds, *But I say unto you*; which Words are very emphatical, and denote the Doctrine delivered to be new, and founded upon our Saviour's own Authority, *I say unto you*. The same Form is used in the fifth of St. Matthew, where our Saviour, in virtue of his Commission received from God, evidently is explaining and enlarging the old Law: "Ye have heard it hath been said by them of old Time, Thou shalt not kill: *But I say unto you*, Whosoever is angry with his Brother without a Cause, shall be in danger of the Judgment. Ye have heard it was said by them of old Time, Thou shalt not commit Adultery: *But I say unto you*, Whosoever looketh on a Woman to lust after her, hath committed Adultery with her already in his Heart." The same is repeated in other Instances; in all which you may observe, that our Saviour enlarges our Duty, and debars us from the least Approaches to Vice, and obliges his Disciples to the greatest Purity, to the strictest and severest Virtue.

To the same Purpose possibly does he speak in the Text: "Evil Things, you know, proceed from an evil Heart; and your Law teaches you, they shall be rewarded accordingly: *But I say unto you*, That not only these evil Things, but every idle Word shall be brought into Judgment." The only Difference in this Case is, that in the Sermon on the Mount the enacting Words are more full, *ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν*, in the Text they are only *λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν* which, though they must be rendered alike in *English*, yet the former, according to the Idiom of the *Greek Tongue*,

is an Expression of greater Weight and Authority: But the Difference is not so great, but that we may suppose our Saviour to use both upon the same Account, to distinguish the Doctrine delivered upon his own Authority from the old received Doctrines of the Law. Allowing this, it follows, that we have in the Text a Rule implied for the Government of Christian Conversation, which is of the greatest Purity, and restrains us not only from all Evil, but from all Appearance of Evil, in our Conversation; from every thing which is inconsistent with the Gravity and serious Demeanour required in a Christian; from such Faults as bear no greater Proportion to the evil Things before-mentioned, than Anger does to Murder, or a wanton Look to Adultery.

The Text then thus understood leads us to inquire, What are the Faults and Levities of Speech, which are not great enough to be numbered with the evil Things before-mentioned, and yet have something in them misbecoming a Disciple of the Gospel; something that is inconsistent with that Temper and Frame of Mind, which are the Ornament of a Christian Spirit, and the Result of a just Sense and Reverence of the high Calling wherewith we are called: For, though it is not our Duty always to be meditating upon the surprizing Mystery of Redemption wrought by Christ, or conversing with Heaven through Prayer, and exalted Thoughts of the wonderful Things of God; yet since this must necessarily, as we are Christians, be great Part of our Employment, we should, even at other Times, when we are taken up in our worldly Affairs, or in friendly Conversation, preserve a Decorum, and maintain a Consistency in our Character; that though we are not talking directly of the Gospel, yet our *Conversation may be as becometh the Gospel of Christ*. For, consider that you are a Disciple
of

of the Cross, a Candidate for Heaven, an adopted Son of God, a Brother of Christ, and an Heir of Glory; and then consider what sort of Behaviour and Conversation best becomes those, who sustain so great a Character. Should such an one spend his Time and Thoughts to utter foolish Jest, to entertain idle Minds with idle Talk, till they are lost in a Forgetfulness both of God and themselves, and every thing else that concerns either their present or future Interest? Should such an one be the Minister of Idleness and Looseness, and serve to no better Purpose in the World, than to furnish Entertainment to the Indisposition that loose and profligate Men have to serious Thought and Reflection?

The Part of a common Wit or Jester does not well become a Man; much less will it become a Christian: It is below the Dignity of Reason; still more so, when Reason is improved by Grace. And to this Purpose is St. Paul's Prohibition in his Epistle to the *Ephesians*; where, among other Things, he forbids them all *foolish Talking and Jest, which are not convenient*. What our Translation renders *Jesting*, the Original stiles *εὐγλωσσία*, which *Aristotle* reckons among his Virtues, and defines it to be the *Habit of Jest, ing handsomely*. So that what passed in the Heathen World for a Virtue is forbidden to a Christian; and it is probable, that by *idle Words* our Saviour meant the Jest which were so much delighted in, and were under so good a Character. And this gives a Reason why our Saviour spoke as introducing a new Law, *But I say unto you*, that every idle Word shall be brought into Judgment; because the Preachers of Morality had taught the contrary before, and placed the Jester, the Man of *idle Words*, among their Heroes, and honoured his Talent of raising Laughter with the Title of a Virtue.

There

There are, no doubt, Seasons of Relaxation both from Business and Religion; and innocent Diversion maintains the Vigour of the Mind, as moderate Exercise does the Strength of the Body: But, as Exercise must answer the Strength and Parts of an human Body, so must your Diversion be answerable to the Temper, and Frame, and Character of a Christian: Otherwise Exercise destroys the Man, and Diversion corrupts the Christian.

We are made by Nature, that is, by God, to be sociable Creatures; and therefore in seeking Society, in cultivating Friendships with each other, we follow the Instinct of Nature; and what Time we spend in Discourse and mutual Converse, if it serves no other Purpose than to maintain a good Friendship and Acquaintance, yet cannot be said to be mis-spent; because in propagating Love and Good-will among ourselves, we serve one End of Nature, and are doing the Work which our Father hath given us: And when Company meet, he that can talk entertainingly upon common Subjects, and divert their Minds with inoffensive Wit, has an excellent Talent; and if Men are endowed with an happy Conception, with a Liveliness of Expression to represent their own Ideas to others, their Conversation may be agreeable without exceeding the Limits of Virtue or Innocence.

But a common Jester, one who is sent for to Company to make Sport, acts a Part much below the Character of a Man, or a Christian: For Jestings, though it may be an innocent Diversion, can never be an honest Employment; it will not bear being made a Profession; and therefore when Men make it their Business, it must needs be an unlawful Calling; and the Jester will lie exposed to the Threatening of the Text, to be called into Judgment for every *idle Word* he speaks. And if
you

you again set before you the Dignity and Character of a Christian, you will easily discern, how suitably and with what a Grace a Christian acts, when his whole Business is to make himself laughed at. *I said of Laughter, it is mad,* says the wise King of Israel. This only Difference there is, and let the Jester have the Benefit of it, the Madman's Folly and Extravagance proceed from Misfortune, the Jester's from Choice: And this Choice will render him accountable for his Extravagancies; and whether he has not the best Title to apply the Text to himself, you must judge from what has been said. His Talent certainly lies in *idle Words*, and therefore he falls under the Letter of the Text; his Business is poor and sordid; he serves to no other Purpose in the World than, like the Fool in a great House, to make Sport; and whether in this he sustains the Character of a Disciple of Christ, let all who have learnt Christ judge.

Consider likewise whether he can justify himself against the Apostolical Rule of *conversing as becomes the Gospel of Christ*. If you say that he means no Harm, I will agree to it; and go yet farther, and add, that he means nothing: But whether this Excuse will come well from the Mouth of one, whom God has endowed with Sense and Reason and Understanding, they who have not lost their own shall determine. But, allowing the Excuse, it will not exempt him from the Judgment of the Text; because by *idle Words*, as has been already shewn, such Words are meant as are capable of this Excuse, as not being chargeable with any great Evil. Lastly, Add to the Text the Comment of St. Paul, and then by *idle Words* we must understand *foolish Talking and Jesting, which are not convenient*. This may teach us what Judgment we are to make from the Scope and Design of the Text: But yet here we can find

find nothing directly pointing against common Conversation, where the Subject of the Discourse is poor and mean, and incapable of yielding any Profit or Improvement; and since we cannot directly conclude from the Text, let us consider,

Secondly, The End and Design of Speech, which is the Gift of God to Mankind: For, if we use our Speech to serve any Purposes contrary to the End designed by God in giving us Speech, we manifestly abuse his Gift, and must answer for such an Abuse.

Speech was given us for the Communication of our Thoughts to each other; the Mind is furnished with Variety of Thoughts and Reflections, some of which are proper for Discourse, and some not: There are some Things which a Man cannot but have Ideas of, some Things which intrude upon the Mind, but are not fit Subjects of Discourse. So that though Speech be given for the communicating of our Thoughts, yet all our Thoughts are not to be disclosed, or brought into Conversation. We must judge what are proper Subjects, and must be answerable for the Government of our Tongues. A Man may be innocent in having some Thoughts in his Mind, which he cannot innocently disclose; the Reason is, because he cannot always chuse his Thoughts, but he can always chuse what he will talk of. As to the proper Ends of Speech, we may reason thus: God has made us reasonable Creatures, and fitted us for his Service, and therefore expects a reasonable Service from us: As he has given us all the Good we enjoy, it is our Duty to praise and adore him; to raise in ourselves and others a Sense of Gratitude and Duty towards him: This is one End of Speech. As he has made us liable to many Wants and Necessities, it is our Duty to pray to him, and in all our Wants to apply to him both in publick and private: This is another End of Speech. Under these

these Heads we include, with respect to Reason, the Contemplation of the Works of Nature and Providence, which serves to give us a just Sense of the Power and Wisdom of God; and, with respect to Speech, all Discourses upon these Subjects, which tend to inspire others with the same awful Sense of the Almighty: These are, no doubt, proper Subjects for reasonable Creatures and Christians.

But then farther, The Wants and Necessities of Nature, which are present, call for our Help. We must by Labour and Industry supply ourselves with Necessaries and Conveniencies of Life; and as this Subject must employ great Part of our Thoughts, so likewise great Part of our Speech; for we cannot live without the mutual Aid and Assistance of each other; and this necessarily makes the Business of Life the frequent Subject of Discourse. And a very proper Subject it is, and Men are usefully employed, when they are learning themselves, or instructing others in the Business of their Trade or Profession. So then this is another End of Speech, that Men may confer concerning the necessary Affairs of Life, and be mutually aiding and helping to each other.

But farther still, God has made us to delight in each other's Company. We are by Nature sociable Creatures, and there is a Pleasure in Conversation, though we have no End to serve by it, no Business to discourse of, nor any thing to ask or desire of one another. And since God has made us sociable Creatures, and it is his Will and express Command to us, that we love and delight in one another; it follows, that it is very lawful and commendable for Men to meet for this Purpose, for the improving and maintaining mutual Love and Friendship: And then another End of Speech is to be a Bond of Society, to be a Means of bringing and keeping Men together.

Now

Now then, if it does appear that Men may meet for mutual Society and Conversation, it follows, that nothing can render Conversation unlawful that is not sinful: For God made us for the Society of each other, and has commanded us to love each other; and therefore, if our Discourses are friendly and social, they are so far virtuous, as they serve the End of Nature.

Now Men may talk of many Subjects, which have no present Profit or Instruction in them, and yet they may serve this End of Conversation, of making Men delight in each other's Company: And since Love and Friendship are such great Gospel-Virtues, a Man may safely dedicate some Hours in the Day to them without a Prospect of serving any other End, and yet be virtuously employed. How often is it seen, that Men by meeting accidentally, and discoursing only upon common Subjects, come to have a good Liking to each other, which by degrees improves into Love and Kindness? How often too are the greatest Enemies reconciled, by being brought into Company together? At first they hardly bear the Sight of each other: Were they to talk of their own Affairs, or even of any thing that would admit of a Dispute, their Resentments would flame out into Anger and Passion; but upon common and indifferent Subjects they make shift to bear with one another in Conversation; which by degrees softens them into a mutual Compliance, and restores the long-forgotten Friendship and Kindness: And will you say the Time is ill spent, that ends so profitably, so much to the Glory of God, and the Good of Men?

At proper Seasons, and in proper Company, we ought to chuse nobler Themes: We have all the Works of Nature before us; we have the History of Providence through many Ages faithfully preserved in

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the sacred Records; and we cannot be excused in over-looking these great Subjects. We owe likewise to one another, whatever each other wants; we should comfort the Weak, instruct the Simple, rebuke the Sinner; *rejoice with them that do rejoice, and mourn with them that mourn.* To neglect the proper Opportunities of performing these Duties, is a Fault not to be extenuated. But then they are as improper at some Times as they are proper at others; and when well-minded, but weak Men, unskilfully break in upon these Subjects, all that they get by it is the Pity of good Men, and the Scorn and Contempt of the Wicked.

Since then Society is a Thing in itself commendable; since one End of Speech is to be a Bond of Society, which is preserved by mutual Converse; and since Religion is not always a proper Subject; it follows, that for the maintaining Society, and for promoting Love and Friendship, Men may innocently meet, and spend their Time upon such Subjects as offer, though the Subject in itself does not tend directly either to the Good of Men, or the Glory of God. If this kind of Conversation be blameable, it must either be a Sin of Commission, or a Sin of Omission. It cannot be a Sin of Commission, because it is supposed to be innocent; and I know no Sin that a Man can commit by being innocently employed or diverted. Neither can it be a Sin of Omission; for no positive Act can be a Sin of Omission. A Man may incur the Guilt of omitting his Duty, whilst he spends his Time in this kind of Discourse; and so he may if he talks of Business or Religion. If your Friend or Relation wants your immediate Help, and you will stand disputing or discoursing of Religion, you incur a Breach of Charity, and are guilty of a Sin of Omission. So if you waste your Time in talking impertinently, when you ought to be at your Business or Calling.

Calling, to the Neglect and Impoverishing of your Family; or if you leave no room for the Duties of Religion, no doubt but you are very guilty: But your Guilt does not arise from the nature of your Conversation, but from your Misapplication of Time; from the Neglect of your proper Business and Duty; and your Guilt will be the same, if you mis-spend your Time, though you discourse upon Subjects ever so great and momentous.

But, Lastly, Let us consider the Nature of Man in general, and the different Degrees of Sense and Understanding that different Men are endowed with. This Consideration must have place in this Question, because the Tongue cannot speak better than the Understanding can conceive; which infers a Proportion between the Abilities of our Mind, and the Soundness of our Speech; the latter must be judged by the former; for a Man cannot be obliged to utter more Wisdom than God has given him.

Now to discourse profitably upon the most profitable Subjects requires a good Share of Reason, a clear Conception, and a distinguishing Judgment: Without these Qualifications Men do but expose the noblest Subjects they take in hand; and, in proportion, there are but few Men thus qualified. I ask therefore, what must the rest do? Would you have them chuse great and noble Subjects, which they do not understand? Or would you have them hold their Tongues? The first, I think, they ought not to do; the last, I am sure, they will not do. It remains then that they must talk of such Things as lie level to their Capacities, that is, of mean and every-day Subjects: For these Men are fitted for Society, and have a Relish of Conversation, as well as brighter Spirits, and they ought not to be excluded from it; and therefore they must be allowed

to

to follow their Genius, which is not likely to lead to any very useful or improving Topicks of Discourse. It is fit, you may say, that these People should learn, and that others should instruct them; so say I too: But to be always under Instruction is not very diverting, and not many will submit to it; and when Men of the same Stamp meet together, who shall be the Instructor?

I think it would be a good Composition, if we could prevail so far with the meaner People, as to restrain them from envious and malicious Discourse, from lewd and filthy Jestings, which are great Ingredients in their Conversation: For, since God has designed them for Society as well as you, and given them no great Share of Understanding, you can neither restrain them from Society, nor exact more Wisdom from them than they have received.

This Consideration will likewise reach the Case of wiser Men: You must not despise your weak Brother. Charity obliges you to be civil and courteous to him; and when a Man of Understanding is joined in Society with a weak Man, the Discourse must be according to the meanest Capacity; and it is sometimes a piece of Charity to submit to the Conversation of Men of much less Ability than yourself.

From all these Considerations together then it appears, that the Conversation of the World, upon common and trivial Subjects, is not blame-worthy. It is a Diversion in which we must not spend too much Time; if we offend in this Respect, we shall be answerable for the Neglect of weightier Matters; but otherwise, if we transgress not the Bounds of Innocence and Virtue, we trust in Christ that our harmless, tho' weak and unprofitable Words, shall not rise up in Judgment against us.

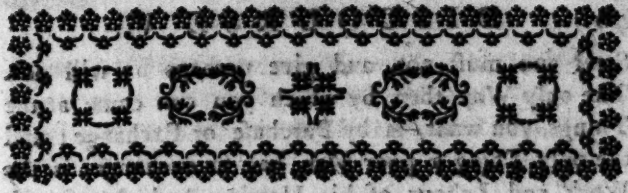
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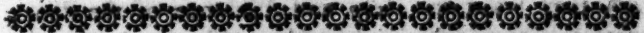
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DISCOURSE V.



PART I.



EPHESIANS iv. 28.

Let him that stole, steal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his Hands the Thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

HE Words now read to you make up a complete Sense, without depending upon what goes before, or comes after. They contain a Confirmation and Explication of the eighth Commandment: For what the Apostle enjoins concerning Labour, and working with our Hands, is no more than the necessary Consequence of the Command, *Thou shalt not steal*. For since all Men are equal Sharers in the Wants and Necessities of Life, and the Things which should supply these Wants are unequally divided, so that some have more than enough, and some much less; it follows, that the Necessities of the one must be supplied from the Abundance of the other.

Steal

Steal you must not, and give perhaps he will not. The only Way then by which you can come at the Things you want, is by Purchase or Exchange; and the only Thing a poor Man has to exchange, is the Work and Labour of his Hands: And therefore it follows as a Consequence of the Law, that since you must not steal, you must work, and purchase by your Labour and Industry the Things which are necessary for your Support and Subsistence. In all that rich Men do, they want the Help and Assistance of the Poor; they cannot minister to themselves either in the Wants, or Conveniencies, or Pleasures of Life: So that the poor Man has as many Ways to maintain himself, as the rich Man has Wants or Desires; for the Wants and Desires of the Rich must be served by the Labour of the Poor. But then the rich Man has often very wicked Desires, and often delights in sinful Pleasures; and though to serve the Rich be the poor Man's Maintenance, yet in these Cases the poor Man must not serve him; and therefore the Apostle adds, that he must labour, *working with his Hands the thing which is good*. His Poverty obliges him to serve Man, and therefore he must *work with his Hands*; and his Reason and Religion oblige him to serve God, and therefore he must work only *the thing which is good*.

Labour is the Business and Employment of the Poor, it is the Work which God has given him to do; and therefore a Man cannot be satisfied in working merely as far as the Wants of Nature oblige him, and spending the rest of his Time idly or wantonly: For if God has enabled him to gain more by his Labour, than his own Wants, and the Conveniencies necessary to his Station, require, he then becomes a Debtor to such Duties, as are incumbent on all to whom God hath dispensed his Gifts liberally. He must consider that

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he owes a Tribute to his Maker for the Health and Strength he enjoys; that there are others who want Limbs, to labour, or Sense and Understanding to arrive at the Knowledge of any Art or Mystery, whereby to maintain themselves; and to these he is a Debtor out of the Abundance of his Strength, and Health, and Knowledge, with which God has blessed him: And therefore he is obliged to labour, working with his Hands the thing which is good, *that he may have to give to him that needeth.*

To the great Men God hath given Riches, to the Mean Strength and Understanding; both are equally indebted for what they have received, and equally obliged to make Returns suitable to their Abilities: And therefore, as the rich Man must honour God out of his Substance, so must the Man of low Degree make his Acknowledgment out of the Product of his Labour and Understanding: And therefore Men are obliged to use Labour and Industry in their honest Callings and Employments, first to provide for themselves, and all who depend upon them for Maintenance; and, in the next place, to provide a Stock to discharge the Debt they owe to their Maker, by administering, in proportion to their Ability, to the Wants and Necessities of their poorer Brethren.

And this may serve to give us a general View of the Sense and Reasoning of the Text; which I shall now more particularly consider, according to the distinct Parts of which it consists. And those I think are four: First, A Prohibition, *Let him that stole, steal no more.* Secondly, In Consequence of that, an Injunction, *But rather let him labour.* Thirdly, A Limitation of this Duty of labouring to Things honest and lawful, expressed in these Words, *Working with his Hands the Thing which is good.* Fourthly, The Rule and

and Measure of this Duty, *That he may have to give to him that needeth.*

First, As to the Prohibition, *Let him that stole, steal no more.* By this we are forbidden the Use of all such Means, for our own Maintenance and Support, as are injurious to our Neighbour. The Command, *Thou shalt not steal*, was given to secure every Man in the Property and Possession of his Goods; and therefore the Reason of the Law reaches to all kinds of Fraud and Deceit by which Men are injured in their Goods and Estate: And there are many Things which, in Propriety of Speech, we do not call Stealing, which nevertheless must be understood to be comprehended in this Law, in virtue of the Reason upon which it is founded. The unjust Acquisition of any thing is Theft; for what you unjustly acquire, another loses, and suffers in his Property, for the Security of which the Law against Theft was enacted: And therefore, in the way even of Trade, if you sell a Commodity to an unskilful Buyer for a Shilling, which, according to the Market Price, is worth but six Pence, you are a Thief to the Value of six Pence; for of so much you unjustly defraud the Man. He that is stronger than another may rob him by Violence, he that is more subtle may do it by Cunning; but if the Injury in both Cases be the same, must not the Guilt be so too?

Some are apt to repine at the unequal Division of the Goods of Fortune, and think that they have as good a natural Right to a Share of the World, as those who at present possess it; and consequently that they may assert their Right, whenever it is in their Power so to do. From these Principles sprang the Sect known by the Name of Levellers, who were for having the World equally divided among the Inhabitants of it; and thought it very unnatural that one should be a

Lord,

Lord, and another a Beggar. This Opinion destroys all Law and Justice, and evacuates the Command given against Theft and Stealing, by laying all Things open and common, and making all Men joint Proprietors of all Things. It renders Labour and Industry useless; since he that labours can acquire nothing which he had not before; and were it a prevailing Opinion, it would soon make the World a Nest of idle Vagabonds, by leaving no Encouragement for the Labour either of the Body or the Mind. But few Words may shew the Vanity of this Opinion: For first, though we cannot produce a divine Law ordering the Distribution of the Things of the World, yet nevertheless Property is evidently of divine Right: For when God gave the Commandment, *Thou shalt not steal*, he confirmed to every one the Possession and Property of his Goods; since from that Time, at least, it became unlawful for any Man to wrest out of his Neighbour's Hands the Goods he was in Possession of. So that it is to no Purpose in this Question to inquire by what Means Men at first divided the World among themselves, or how one acquired in any thing a private Right to himself; since we find this Right and Property declared and confirmed by a subsequent Act of God. God is the supreme Proprietor of all Things; and it will not be denied but that he might at first have divided the World as he thought good; and this he may do at any Time, since he cannot lose or forfeit his Right: And therefore it matters not by what Means the World was divided, when God confirmed the Division, and established Men in their Right and Property; since his Confirmation gave a Right, if there were none before. And hence it appears, that Property is established, if not by the Law of Reason and Nature, yet by the positive Law of

God; which is to us the highest Reason and Authority. And from hence it follows, that no Man can acquire the Possession of any thing which is at present another's, without the Consent of the present Proprietor fairly obtained. And to this Right of his own establishing even God himself submits: The Poor are his peculiar Charge; his Providence stands engaged for their Support: But neither does God force us to part with our Estates to the Poor, or give the Poor any Right to serve themselves out of the Abundance and Superfluity of others; but he has left them to be maintained by Charity, that is, by the free and voluntary Gift of such as can spare from their own Subsistence some Part of what they enjoy. Now none can have greater Want than those who are Objects of Charity; and since God has not thought fit to break into the sacred Law of Property for the Relief of these, no Man's Necessity can be great enough to warrant him to transgress the Law, since the greatest Necessity is made subject to it: In Consequence of this it follows, that those who have not enough of the good Things of this Life for their Maintenance and Support, are obliged to work for their Living: Which is the

Second Thing to be considered in the Text, *But rather let him labour.* Your Wants must be supplied from the Abundance of others; and therefore you must find some honest Way of transferring to yourself what at present is not yours: This must be done by Consent of the present Possessor, which must be obtained either by Purchase or Intreaty. A Man may, if he pleases, part with his Goods freely to others by way of Gift; and it should seem, that what another freely gives, we may freely and innocently take. And this raises a Question, Whether Begging be a lawful Way of maintaining ourselves? If a Man may lawfully beg, and can

can by begging raise a sufficient Maintenance, then it does not necessarily follow, that because we must not steal, therefore we must labour; for it may be answered, we may beg. In this Question we must distinguish concerning Persons; for some have a Right to be maintained by Charity; and those who have a Right to this kind of Maintenance, have a Right to ask for it, that is, to beg the Charity of all well-disposed Christians. Charity is the Inheritance of the Poor; it is, as I may say, their Property: And therefore for any one, who is not an Object of Charity, to live by Charity, is invading the Right and Property of the Poor; which is by much the worst Way of stealing.

Who are not Objects of Charity, the Apostle plainly tells us in another Place, *If any Man will not work, neither let him eat*; that is, if a Man can work, and will not, he ought to starve. Now, no Man ought to starve, who ought to be maintained by Charity; for such have a Right to eat of Charity: From whence it follows, that such as can labour, but will not, have no Right to Charity, and consequently have no Right to ask it: And therefore Begging, for such as are able to labour, is an unlawful Calling. It is indeed but a more specious Theft: For first, you do not fairly obtain the Consent of the Proprietor to part with what you by begging extort from him; which is a necessary Condition in all just and lawful Acquisitions. You represent yourself as an Object of Charity, pretend Age, or Sickness, or Lameness, or some other Indisposition, which renders you incapable of an honest Calling. The charitable Man, as bound in Duty, relieves these Necessities, and, out of what he allots for Charity, gives something to you. Here you manifestly deceive him; for, did he know you, he would give you nothing; and therefore, by your false Pretences, you fraudulently obtain his Consent to part with his Money

to you: This is a direct Cheat. Secondly, you diminish the Maintenance of such as are truly Objects of Charity. If the Money that is given charitably in this Kingdom were applied only to proper Objects, our Streets need not be crowded with Beggars: But since Begging has been found to be a profitable Trade, it has diverted the Maintenance of the Poor to a parcel of idle, lazy Hypocrites, who are taught to whine and beg with as much Art and Care, as others are taught their lawful Trades and Mysteries. These common Beggars are publick Robbers of the Poor, and live out of their peculiar Inheritance. The Money which well-disposed People allot of their Substance for the Maintenance of the Poor, these insinuating Hypocrites, by their pretended Wants and Necessities, appropriate to themselves; so that their Employment is like to that of a Pirate, they lie in wait to intercept whatever comes to the Relief and Support of the Poor. Now if common Begging is but a disguised Kind of Robbery, and really injurious both to Rich and Poor, it follows, that this Crime, like all others, falls under the Care and Correction of the Civil Magistrate, and that Laws made to restrain this Evil, and to punish idle Vagabonds, are founded in Reason and Justice; and accordingly all wise States have made Provision to prevent and to punish this Evil.

Since then it is neither lawful for you to beg, nor to steal, it follows, that you must labour, and by your own Industry and Diligence maintain yourself, and such others as have a Right to be maintained by you. The Apostle adds, that you must labour, *working with your Hands*: Which is your Duty when you are not capable of any better Work; for such as cannot live without it, must live by bodily Labour. But the Injunction is more general, and includes all Kinds of Labour

Labour and Toil, or Study, by which Men may be serviceable to themselves and others: And it may properly be asked, how far this Duty extends? And it will, I conceive, be no unseasonable Digression to inquire, whether only such are obliged to labour, who cannot live without it; or whether those who have enough to support themselves without either stealing or begging, are not likewise obliged to turn to some honest Calling and Employment?

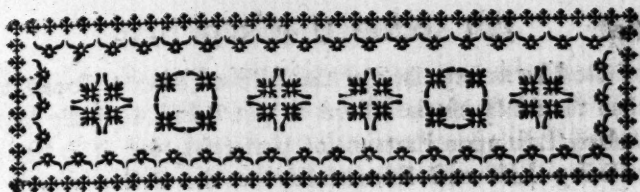
Man, I think, was not made to be idle; God has not given him Sense and Understanding to sit still and do nothing. If Man was made only to eat and drink, then indeed it would follow, that those who have enough to eat and drink, need do nothing else: But if he is made for, and is capable of nobler Employment; then it is a very absurd Thing to ask, whether a Man may be idle, provided he wants nothing? For, if he is not made merely to serve his own Wants, then his wanting nothing can never be a Reason for his doing nothing. The necessary Affairs of the World cannot be managed by the Labour of the Hand only: The Head must be employed in all Matters of Policy and Government, in preserving Peace and Order in the World, and in all Matters that concern the future and present Well-being of Mankind. These are Matters of higher Moment than to fall under the Direction of Artificers. These are Things of the last Consequence, and must be regarded; and therefore it is the Duty of some to qualify themselves for these Purposes. And every Man owes it as a Duty to God and his Country to render himself serviceable according to the Station he is in, and to qualify himself to discharge such Offices of Trust and Power, as generally fall to the Share of Men of his Rank and Degree; that when he is called upon by Authority to take any Office upon

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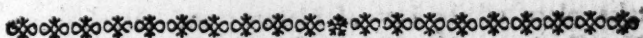
him, he may be able to discharge it with Credit to himself, and Benefit to others. Those of the highest Degree among us reckon it among their Titles of Honour that they are born Counsellors of the Kingdom: The Consequence, I think, is extremely plain, that it is their indispensable Duty, by Labour and Study, and Knowledge of the Laws and Constitutions of their Country, to fit themselves to be what they say they are. The Men of Estates among us are generally entrusted with the Execution of the Laws in their Country; and can it be a Doubt, whether they ought to be fit for their Employment, or no? From these, and such-like Considerations, it appears, that all Men are obliged to that kind of Labour and Work, which is suitable to the Station in which God has placed them. We generally say, that God has made nothing to no Purpose; and yet, pray tell me what the rich Man is made for, if his Business be only to eat and drink, and spend his Estate? Can you justify the Wisdom of Providence in sending such a Creature into the World? There is Work cut out for all Creatures, from the highest to the lowest; all things in Nature have their proper Business, and are made to serve some wise End of God. The Angels are his ministering Spirits, they attend upon and execute his Commands. The inanimate Things of the World have their Office; the Sun duly performs his Course, and rules the Day; the Moon and Stars rule the Night: And if there be a Man in the World who has no Work, but was formed to be idle, he, among all the Works of God, is the only Thing that is so. Are not Sense and Reason great Gifts of God? And if he has exempted your Hands from Labour and Toil, by supplying you with Necessaries and Conveniencies of Life, will he not expect that you should improve your nobler Parts? Will he

he not exact an Account from you, how you turned your better Talent, and what Use you made of his more excellent Gifts? Is it reasonable, that a poor Man should be accountable for not getting Bread for himself by the Labour of his Hands, and that the rich Man should be liable to no Judgment for not getting Understanding, which is a more valuable Possession, by the Work and Labour of his Mind? Bread is the Nourishment of the Animal, but Knowledge is the Food of the Man: By one we grow to the World, by the other we reach to Heaven. And has God made it an indispensable Duty to labour for the Meat which perisheth, and not required an equal Concern and Labour for the Food of Life and Immortality?

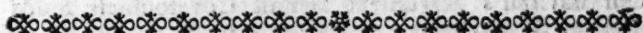




DISCOURSE V.



PART II.



 PROCEED now to the Third Thing, which is the Limitation, by which we are confined to work only the Things which are good, foregoing all unlawful Means of supporting ourselves : *Let him labour, working with his Hands the Thing which is good.*

Had not this Condition been expressed, it might have been collected from the Nature of the Command ; for if the Law of God be superior to our Necessities in any Point, it must be so in all Points. The Reason why we must not steal, but labour, is this: That we must not do evil, or transgress the Laws of God, to supply our Wants or Necessities. And if for this Reason we must not steal, neither must we lye or perjure ourselves, or do any thing else inconsistent with the Principle or Maxim upon which this Law is built: Our Saviour tells us, that *Man shall not live by Bread alone, but by every Word that proceedeth out of the Mouth of God.* If so, then must we not for Bread transgress any Part of the Word of God: For if the Word

of God be as necessary to the Life of Man as Bread; then to transgress the Word to get Bread, is really to destroy Life upon Pretence of preserving it; it is sacrificing Life and Immortality to the Belly, which must perish together with its Meat. As we are Men, we are the Servants of God; and therefore to serve him is the Law of our Nature, which is of the highest Obligation: As we are poor, we must serve Men, which is the Law of our Condition, which can never take place of the Law of Nature; and therefore no Necessity can dispense with the Service of God, or justify us in the Breach or Contempt of his Laws. Our Saviour's Argument against Covetousness holds likewise in this Case; *Is not the Life more than Meat, and the Body than Raiment?* You may by the Service of Men get Food and Raiment, but by the Service of God you hold your very Life and Being. When you have done your utmost to provide Necessaries and Conveniencies for the Support of Life, you must depend upon God for the Continuance of it; for at his Displeasure we all perish: He can render all your Care abortive, by shortening the Life which you take such Care to provide for; and therefore the Wants and Necessities of Life can never be a justifiable Excuse for transgressing the Laws of God. For no Man would give his Life for Bread; and yet he that disobey's God for the sake of any present or temporal Advantage, does indeed hazard Life itself for the sake of the Conveniencies of Life. Since then no Necessity can be great enough to excuse the Neglect of our Duty to God, it follows, that the Apostle's Limitation must always take place, and we must labour, *working the Thing which is good.*

From hence we may learn what Value there is in the Excuse, which Servants and poor Men usually make

make for themselves, when they are sensible that they are employed otherwise than they ought to be: They dare not, they say, desert the Service of their Master, upon whom they depend for their Livelihood; the Work they do is his, and not theirs, and therefore he ought to be considered as the Person acting, and not they; and consequently the Guilt should be all his, from whose Choice and Will the Evil flows, in which they are only Instruments, not acted by Choice, but by the Necessity of their Condition. The first Part of this Excuse is evidently false, upon Supposition that God is superior to Man; for if God be your supreme Master, then is it no Excuse to say you served another Master, when you disobeyed him. The Excuse is likewise ridiculous; for though you depend upon Man for your Livelihood, yet you depend upon God for your Life; and Life is more than Meat; and therefore to disobey the Lord of Life to get a Maintenance is impious and foolish. But neither will the other Part of the Excuse do any better Service; for though we allow that the Evil you do is not of your own chusing or contriving, but that you act as an Instrument of another's Will, yet will not this clear you of the Guilt of the Evil you do. This Excuse may serve for an Horse, but it will not serve for a Man; for to Man God has given Reason and Judgment to govern and direct all his Actions; and that Reason will make you a Principal in all the Evil you do. Poverty neither divests you of Reason, nor exempts you from the Rule and Government of it; and therefore the poor Man must live by Reason, as well as the Rich, and must be judged by it too, and consequently can never be excused for acting contrary to what his own Sense and Reason direct. From what has been said, it is manifest, that as the Law of your Condition obliges you to work and labour for your Support

Support and Maintenance; so the Law of Reason and Nature, which is a superior Law, obliges you to work only Things which are lawful and honest, that you may preserve a *Conscience void of Offence towards God and towards Man.*

But you may ask perhaps, what are lawful and honest Employments? In Answer to this, it must be considered, that the Work and Labour of the Poor depends upon the Wants and Desires of the Rich: For if a poor Man spends his Time in doing what no body desires him to do, he may go unpaid for his Pains; and when he has done, be as far to seek for Bread as he was before. From hence it follows, that you must be confined to some Work, which may answer to the Wants or Desires of Life. Now the Things which Men want, are either the Necessaries, or Conveniences, or Pleasures of Life; and all Trades or Callings are subservient to one or other of these.

God has made nothing necessary to us, which is not lawful and honest; and therefore it is lawful to provide whatever is necessary to Life; and therefore all Trades and Employments which arise from the necessary Wants of Life are lawful Trades. Under this Head come all the Works and Labours of Husbandry, which supply the World with Food, and Nourishment, and Cloathing; and all other Trades, which furnish us with such things as we cannot well be without.

When Men are furnished with Necessaries, they then look out for Conveniences; and if rich Men may lawfully desire and enjoy the Conveniences of Life, then poor Men may lawfully provide them by their Labour and Industry: And this is a large Field of Work. Whatever is useful or ornamental in Life may be reckoned under this Head: And Conveniences must be estimated according to the Degrees and Quality

of Men; and as long as Men seek the Conveniencies which are agreeable to their Station, and bear Proportion to the Plenty of their Circumstances, they are blameless: If they exceed this Measure, they fall into Pride and Extravagance, and the Sins consequent upon them, such as ruining themselves and their Families, and mis-spending the Substance which God has given them. But since all Conveniencies are suitable to some Condition or other, they may all be the proper Subject of the Labour of the Poor, who work indifferently for all, from the Prince to the Commoner, without inquiring, or being obliged to inquire, into the Circumstances or Condition of the Man who employs them, who alone is answerable for the Prudence of his Undertaking: And therefore likewise all Trades and Employments, which provide Things useful or ornamental in Life, are lawful Callings.

The next Thing which may furnish Work and Employment for Men are the Pleasures of Life. Some Pleasures are very innocent, and some very wicked; and the Rule in this Case must follow this Distinction: Such Pleasures as the rich Man may lawfully enjoy, the poor Man may lawfully serve him in; such Pleasures as are wicked may neither be enjoyed or provided without Guilt. I need not instance in Particulars of either kind: To serve the Lusts and Passions of Men; to make Vice easy and practicable; to remove the Obstacles which lie in Men's Way to wicked Pleasures, is directly to become the Servant of Sin: This is a plain Case.

But then there are some Things which, according as they are used, may administer to innocent Pleasure, or to Vice and Immorality. Wine may make the Heart of Man glad, or it may destroy and drown his Reason, and sink him down to the Degree of a Brute. And hence a Question may arise, How far we may lawfully

lawfully provide Things of this kind? And in the Case already mentioned it may be inquired, Whether it be lawful to keep Publick Houses, which are so often abused, and made ill Use of? Now, since the Innocence or Wickedness of these Things lies altogether in the Use of them, he that uses them amiss may be to blame, and he that provides them may be innocent. If you buy a Sword, and stab a Man, you that do the Murder are guilty, but not he that either made or sold the Sword. The same will hold in the present Case: Publick Houses are necessary often to transact Business in, to entertain Strangers, or to receive Men who meet to be innocently chearful. These are all lawful Things, and therefore here is a Foundation for a lawful Calling. This may indeed be abused; and what may not? By the same Rule you must shut up not only Publick Houses, but most other Houses too; for there are very few Things sold, which are not capable of being abused. Besides, since the Thing in its own Nature is indifferent, and may be either well or ill used, one Man's using it ill cannot deprive another Man of his Right to use it well; and if, notwithstanding the Excess of some, others may use the innocent Pleasure, then they may be served by others in their innocent Pleasure; because what one Man may innocently enjoy, another may innocently provide; and consequently to serve them cannot be a Crime.

When Things in their own Nature evidently tend to corrupt and debauch Men's Manners, they are capable of no Defence. Whatever exposes or renders Religion contemptible; whatever serves to make Virtue and Piety ridiculous, to make Vice glorious, to give Lust the Dominion over Reason, or to heighten the Appetite after sinful Pleasures, is of this kind. These Considerations have carried many wise and good Men
unto

unto an utter Condemnation of the Employments of the Stage, as unlawful Means of Maintenance. And whatever may be said of the Representations of the Theatre in general; yet when they transgress the Bounds of Decency, and employ their Wit and Art to make Virtue, and Sobriety, and Chastity ridiculous; when they treat the sacred Laws of Marriage with Contempt, and paint out the Villain, who betrays his Friend, breaks the Laws of Hospitality, and brings to Ruin unguarded Innocence, as an accomplished Character, and fit for Imitation, there can be no doubt but the Employment is extremely wicked. And whenever the Stage is so employed, every good Man, every good Christian, must condemn it. Poets were anciently Instructors of Mankind, and Teachers of Morality; and Virtue never went off the Stage without Applause, nor Vice without Contempt. Thus Heathen Poets wrote!

It may be worth inquiring, whether Gaming can be a lawful Calling or Profession for Men to maintain themselves by? That there is room for this Inquiry, is evident from the great Numbers who live and thrive by it. Those who live upon this Art may say in their own Excuse, what the unjust Steward said for himself, *Dig I cannot, to beg I am ashamed*: And I am afraid they are not unlike him in the Method they chuse to support themselves. Gaming may either be reduced from Chance to Art, or it may not. If it cannot be reduced to an Art, then it cannot be the Subject of an Employment to live by; for you will not say, that a Man may be maintained by that, which, according to the very Nature of the Thing, may as well prove his Ruin as his Maintenance: And therefore, if Gaming is built purely upon Chance, no Man can or ought to make it his Calling; because it can never answer the

End,

End; and bring in a constant Supply for the constant Wants of Life. If Gaming may by Skill and Practice be reduced to an Art, then it is a very unjust Art, and must be a dishonest Way of getting Money: For Men venture their Money upon a Supposition that they have an equal Chance with you; but if you are Master of a Skill which can overrule this Chance, you destroy the Game by taking away the Chance, which is the Foundation of it; and you make your Advantage purely of the Ignorance and Folly of others, and live by an Art which you dare not own; for were it known, you could not live by it. So that, take it either Way, to play upon the Square cannot, in the Nature of the Thing, be a Maintenance, because it may equally happen to be your Undoing; to play otherwise is a Cheat and Abuse upon Mankind, and cannot be an honest or fair Livelihood.

From what has been discoursed in general, and upon the particular Cases mentioned, we may collect what is an honest Labour or Maintenance: We must follow our honest Callings honestly. The next Thing to be considered is, what is the Measure of this Duty; whether we are obliged to labour merely to supply our own Wants and Necessities; or whether there be any other Duties incumbent on us, which must likewise be answered by our Labour and Toil? This the Apostle has settled in the

Fourth and last place, enjoining us to labour, *that we may have to give to him that needeth*. So that the End we ought to aim at by our Labour and Industry is to enable us, not only to support ourselves and our Families, but to be Contributors likewise to the Wants and Necessities of such as are not able to work and labour for themselves. Charity has no Measure, but the Wants of others, and our own Ability. The

Scripture

Scripture has told us, *the Poor shall never fail*: There never will want Objects of Charity, and therefore we can never get beyond this Rule of the Apostle; for the more we can get, the more we ought to give, and therefore must constantly labour to enable ourselves to answer this End in the best manner. But there are many Things which a poor Man ought to provide for, before he can come to exercise Charity: The first poor Man he is to take care of is himself; his own Wants and Necessities must be answered out of his Labour: Nor is he obliged only to provide for his present Wants, but by Industry and Frugality to lay up in Store, out of what he can spare from his present Maintenance, to provide against the Casualties and Misfortunes of Life, which he, with all Mankind, is liable to. He may be disabled by Sicknefs, or Lame-ness, or Age, and rendered incapable of following his Trade or Labour; and these being such common Incidents, he is bound to provide for them. This is evidently a Consequence of the Apostle's Rule, that we must work to serve the Ends of Charity. The first Piece of Charity you are bound to, is to keep your- self from being a Charge and Burden upon Charity, that there may be the greater Maintenance for such as are truly necessitous; and therefore it is a Breach of this Rule, instead of providing for Futurity, to spend all at present, and leave yourself to be a Burden upon the common Charity, whenever Age or Sicknefs disables you: So that it is a Duty owing, as well to your poorer Brethren, as yourself, to keep yourself by the honest Arts of Labour and Frugality, from preying upon their Maintenance, when your Strength and La- bour forsake you. And hence it appears, that by the Apostle's Rule, you are bound as well to Thrift and Frugality, as to Labour; and therefore such as work hard,

hard, and spend freely all they get, are highly to be blamed, and may be found at last to have spent out of the Poor's Stock; since by squandering their own, they come at last to a Necessity of living upon Charity; by which means others are straightened, that they may be supplied.

Next to yourself you are likewise bound to provide for your Family, for your Children, and near Relations. This is a Duty of Nature; and the Apostle has told us, *If any Man provide not for his own, especially those of his own Household, he is worse than an Heathen, and hath already denied the Faith.* Nor must their present Maintenance be your only Care, but likewise their future Well-being: For the same Reasons which oblige you to lay up in Store for yourself against future Calamities, oblige you to do the same for your Family. But what is the Measure, you will say, of this Provision for Futurity? Who can guess how much himself or his Family may want hereafter? And when shall we satisfy this Duty, so as to be able to begin the other of being charitable to our poorer Brethren? Our own present Wants must be supplied; and therefore he who can get no more than is necessary for the present Maintenance of himself and Family, is under no Obligation to give to Charity: But when we get beyond this Necessity, we are then obliged to provide for our own future Wants, and the present Wants of the Poor; so that I reckon to lay up in Store for ourselves, and to give in Charity to others, are concurrent Duties.

But it must be allowed, that Charity is naturally the Duty rather of the Rich than the Poor. And if it be the Duty of the Poor to give to Charity out of the little their Hands can earn; how much more will it be expected from such, to whom God has given more

more than enough; who are appointed Stewards over his Household, and are entrusted with the good Things of the World, that they may use them to the Honour and Glory of his Name, and to the Comfort and Relief of their poor Brethren? He has given you plentifully, and made the Things you enjoy to be your own; he has secured to you your Possessions, and commanded that no Man rob or steal from you, on purpose that you may shew your Love by the Freedom of your Offering. Look down and behold the Toil and Labour of Mankind, how in the Sweat of their Brow they eat their Bread; how their Hands are galled with Work, and their Shoulders with Burdens; And then look up to Him, who has exempted you, and given you a Life full of Ease and Comfort; and reflect what it is you owe to this kind, to this bountiful God. The Time will come when you must quit your Lands and your Houses; when you shall be Suitors for Mercy and Favour: *Make to yourselves therefore Friends of the Mammon of Unrighteousness*, that when all shall leave and forsake you, you may be received into the Habitations of Righteousness, where there is Mercy, and Peace, and Joy for evermore.

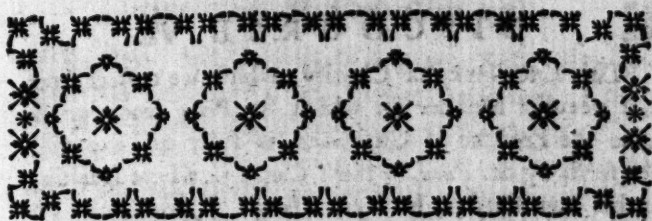


DISCOURSE VI.

P. A. R. T.

H. Exposition in the Text being joined
 with other Expositions to solemnity, and
 Watchfulness in Prayer, to Investigation,
 and to a faithful Use and Exercise of the
 Gifts and Graces of God bestowed on the several Mem-
 bers of the Church, and yet being introduced in the
 distinguishing manner, which is here before
 clearly expressed, and plainly shews how highly
 the Apostle esteemed the great value of Charity; and
 that it is the Perfection of Christian the very last
 and Soul of all other Duties, which without this is
 of no Value in the sight

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DISCOURSE VI.



PART I.



I PETER iv. 8.

And above all Things have fervent Charity among yourselves; for Charity shall cover the Multitude of Sins.

THE Exhortation in the Text being joined with other Exhortations to Sobriety, and Watchfulness in Prayer, to Hospitality, and to a faithful Use and Exercise of the Gifts and Graces of God bestowed on the several Members of the Church; and yet, being introduced in this distinguishing Manner, *Above all Things have fervent Charity among yourselves*, plainly shews, how highly the Apostle esteemed this great Virtue of Charity; and that it is the Perfection of a Christian, the very Life and Soul of all other Duties, which without this are empty Performances, and of no Value in the Sight of God.

This

This Excellency of Charity, which we collect from the peculiar Manner in which St. Peter recommends it to the Practice of Christians, is fully and expressly set forth by St. Paul in the 1 Cor. 13. where speaking in his own Person, he says, *Though I speak with the Tongues of Men and of Angels, and have not Charity, I am become as sounding Brass, or a tinkling Cymbal. And though I have the Gift of Prophecy, and understand all Mysteries, and all Knowledge; and though I have all Faith, so that I could remove Mountains, and have no Charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my Goods to feed the Poor, and though I give my Body to be burned, and have not Charity, it profiteth me nothing.* It is to be observed, that St. Paul does not merely compare and prefer Charity before all spiritual Gifts and Attainments, before Liberality and Almsgiving; but he declares, that these without Charity are nothing, of no Value in the Sight of God, of no Profit to the Salvation of Man. Is it not therefore of great Consequence to us rightly to understand this great Virtue, that we may use proper Methods to attain it; since it is that only which can sanctify our Offerings to God, and make either our Prayers or Praises, or our Alms and Oblations, acceptable in his Sight; since it is that only which can make the Gifts and Abilities bestowed on us of any Use, or render them a proper Means to save ourselves and others?

It is necessary to enter into the Consideration of the Nature of this great Virtue, that we may rightly apprehend the Meaning of the Text. St. Peter affirms, that *Charity shall cover a Multitude of Sins.* Whatever we are to understand by this Expression, it is evident that this great Promise or Effect must be ascribed to that Virtue only, which the Apostle had in his Mind, and which he meant to express in the Words
of

of the Text; and if we apply it to any Thing else, we abuse his Authority, and deceive ourselves. I shall therefore confine this Discourse to two Inquiries:

First, What that *fervent Charity* is, which the Apostle in the Text so earnestly recommends; and,

Secondly, What is the true Meaning of the Apostle's Affirmation concerning this Charity, that *it shall cover the Multitude of Sins.*

As to the First Inquiry, it will appear by the Language made use of by St. Peter, that he is not recommending any particular Duty, much less any particular Acts of Duty. (The Words in the Original, rendered by our Translators *fervent Charity* , are *ἀγάπη ἐκλεκτή* , *continual or uninterrupted Love.*) Love is a Principle, or a good Habit of Mind, from which many Duties flow, but does not denote any one kind of Duty more than another; and therefore the Charity spoken of in the Text has no more immediate Relation to *Almsgiving* , (as the Use of the Word in our Language often leads People to think it has) than it has to *Patience* , *Forgiveness of Injuries* , or any other natural Effect of Love or Charity. It is therefore the Principle of Charity, or a general Beneficence of Mind towards one another, which the Apostle recommends. And this must be constant and regular, not subject to the Efforts of Passion or Resentment; it must preside with a Superiority over all the Desires of our Heart, that neither Wantonness and Lust, nor Anger and Revenge, nor Covetousness and Ambition, may carry us aside from the Ways of Righteousness and Equity in our Dealings one with another.

This Description distinguishes the Virtue of the Gospel from what the World means by Good-nature, which seems to be a Quality resulting rather from the Constitution, than from the Reason of a Man, and is frequently
subject

subject to great Efforts of Passion and Resentment; to the Desires of Ambition and Lasciviousness, and other Vices, which have no Society, which can have none, with Christian Charity. Good-nature has oftentimes something that wants to be corrected in the very Principles of it; sometimes it is an agreeable and easy Weakness of Mind, or an Indolence or Carelessness with respect to Persons and Things. But Charity is Reason made perfect by Grace: It is a Beneficence which arises from a Contemplation of the World, from a Knowledge of the great Creator, and the Relation we bear to Him and to our Fellow-Creatures: It is that Reason into which all Duties owing from Man to Man are ultimately resolved; and when we chuse to say in a word what is the Character, the Temper, or the Duty of a Disciple of the Gospel, *Charity* is the only Word that can express our Meaning.

The same Sort of Actions materially considered do oftentimes proceed from very different Principles. Liberality and Hospitality are natural Effects of Charity, which inspires us with the tender Motions of Compassion and Benevolence towards our Fellow-Creatures: But it is no very uncommon Thing for Men to be liberal out of Pride, and hospitable out of Vanity; *to do their Alms before Men, that they may be seen of them*; and of such our Saviour's Judgment is, *that they shall have no Reward of their Father, which is in Heaven.*

This leads to an Inquiry, By what Means we may certainly distinguish the Principles from which our Actions are derived, without which we can have no well-grounded Confidence towards God, how specious soever the Appearance may be which we make in the Eyes of the World? The ready Answer to which Inquiry is, that we must consult our own Hearts, and

examine what passes in them, in order to form a right Judgment upon the Motives of our own Actions. But if we consider what is meant by searching the Heart, we shall find that to search the Heart, and to examine into the Motives and Principles of our Actions, is one and the same Thing; and therefore this Direction does not set us one Step forward in the Inquiry. Besides, it is no easy Matter to come to the Knowledge of our own Hearts, since from Experience it is plain, that Men do impose upon themselves at least as often as they do upon the World; and find an Ease and Satisfaction in doing the Things, which shall yield no Fruit in the great Day, when the Secrets of all Hearts shall be disclosed. And though in Actions which require Deliberation, and are not undertaken without a previous Debate had with ourselves upon their Expediency or Inexpediency, an honest Man may judge of his own Motives and Sincerity; yet a thousand Things there are which Men do habitually, and with so much Ease and Readiness, as not to attend to the Influence of any particular Motive at the Time of doing the Action. Charitable Persons do not, in each single Instance of Charity, set before their Minds the Connection of that Action with the Honour of God, and the Good of the World; nor can they perhaps be able to say what particular Motive led to each Act of Charity. A Man of a regular Chastity and Sobriety does not every Day, nor perhaps every Month, reason himself into the Observation of these Duties, and exert the Motives in his Heart, upon which the Practice of these Duties is founded; nor can he answer, should he be examined to the Point, how far his Virtue is owing to this or the other Motive, or how far to his natural Temperament and Constitution. And since no one Virtue consists in a single Act, or in any certain

determinate Number of single Acts, but in a regular and habitual Conformity to the Rules of Reason and Morality; which Conformity the more habitual it is, the less we feel of the Influence of any particular Motives; it is hardly possible for Men to estimate the Good or Evil of their Actions, by considering the immediate and sensible Connection between each Action, and the Motives producing it. For, as many Motions of the Body, which depend on the Acts of our Will, are exerted with the greatest Reason, and yet the Reason of exerting them is but seldom by any, and by some hardly ever attended to; so in moral Actions a Man of confirmed habitual Goodness does many things right, without recurring back by Reflection to the special Grounds and Reasons of Duty, in which the Morality of such Actions is founded.

For these Reasons, and for others which might be assigned, it seems to me to be a very distracting Method, to put People upon Inquiry into the Motives of all their particular Actions; and still more unreasonable it seems to be, to exclude Sincerity from all Actions that are not immediately influenced by a special Consideration of the proper Motives of Religion; because, in this Case, the more naturally and habitually Men do good, the more Reason they will have to doubt of their Sincerity.

We must therefore search after a more equitable and more practicable Way of judging of our Sincerity. Our Saviour tells us, we must *love our Neighbour as ourselves*; making hereby that Love, which naturally every Man bears to himself, to be the Standard of that Love and Charity which we ought to have to one another. As therefore it is sufficient to love our Neighbour as ourselves; so likewise it will be sufficient Evidence of the Sincerity of our Charity, if we can give

give as good Proof of our Love towards our Neighbour, as we ordinarily can do of our Love towards ourselves.

Now certain it is, that the Principle of Self-preservation does generally act so uniformly in Men, that they do the Things most necessary to their own Well-being, without much Thought and Reflection upon the Reasons for so doing; nor do we ever suspect Men so far in the Sincerity of their Love to themselves, as to question whether the Things which they do rightly for their own Preservation, proceed from proper Motives, and out of a due Regard to their own Well-being.

What the Principle of Self-preservation is with respect to ourselves, the same is Charity with respect to our Neighbour: And the more real and vigorous this Principle is, the more easily, and with the less Deliberation, does it exert the Acts of Love and Beneficence towards our Fellow-Creatures. Hypocrites and Dissemblers, and self-interested Persons, have always a Design in what they do; and therefore they necessarily deliberate, whether it be worth their while to do good to others or no; and can therefore assign to themselves a particular Reason for any good Office they perform to their Neighbour: And it is a great Presumption, that a Man acts upon a general Principle of Charity and Humanity, when he lives well towards others, without having a particular Reason to assign in every Instance for so doing.

It is either a Principle of Self-love, or a Principle of Charity, that inclines us to do good to others. Where Men act out of Self-love, and seek to promote their own Interest, to gratify their own Vanity or Ambition by serving others, there is so much Design in what they do, that they cannot but be conscious of the

Reasons which prevail with them: And where there are no such Reasons to be assigned, what Cause is there for Men to suspect their own Sincerity, or to imagine, that the Love they shew to others proceeds from any thing but a good Principle?

It is therefore, if not a certain Rule, yet at least a very reasonable Presumption, that we act upon a true Principle of Charity, when we seek the Ease, and Satisfaction, and Comfort of others, without being conscious to ourselves of any selfish Views to our own Interest in what we do.

But to prevent Mistakes, I would not be understood, by laying down this Rule, to condemn Men always in the good they do to others, with a View to themselves: For surely, it is as reasonable to exchange good Offices, as other less valuable Conveniencies of Life; and, indeed, the Happiness of civil Life consists in this mutual Exchange of good Offices: And therefore, where Men serve others in an honest Way, expecting only honest Returns, this Justice must at least be done them, to own that they are fair Traders, and deal in a good Commodity. The Apostle to the *Hebrews* exhorts us to *provoke one another to Love and to good Works*; and the best Way to provoke others to Love, is to shew Love towards them.

But the surest Way to know whether we are influenced as we ought to be by a Principle of Charity, is to consider not this or that particular Action, for very bad Men may sometimes do very good Things; nor yet to consider our Behaviour with respect to particular Persons, for the worst of Men are capable of strong Passions of Love for particular Relations and Acquaintance; but to reflect upon our Carriage towards all in general, and in all Instances: For, if the Principle of Charity be in us, it will discover itself in an Uniformity

munity of all our Actions; as the Principle of Self-preservation makes Men seek their own Good, not at one Time more than another, or in one Instance more than another, but at all Times and in all Instances equally.

If therefore we find that our Sentiments of Tenderness and Humanity are confined to certain Persons, to our Relations or particular Friends, to the Men of our own Sect or Party; we may be sure that such Sentiments are the Product of some partial and narrow Views, and not the genuine Offspring of true Charity, which is in its Nature extensive and universal, and reaches as far, nay much beyond the Power we have of doing good: Or, if we find that in some Instances we are apt enough to deal justly and mercifully with our Neighbours, but that in others we are regardless of Mercy and Justice, and value not the Credit, or Reputation, or Contentment of our Brethren, but are ready to sacrifice them all to our own Passions and corrupt Inclinations; our being vile in some Instances is a certain Indication, that our being good in others is not owing to a Principle of Charity, but to something else, which we may call by any other Name rather than Virtue. If you love not the World, and the good Things of it, so much as to injure your Neighbour for the sake of making a Gain to yourself, it is well. If you can part with your own for the Relief of the Necessities of such as are indigent, it is better. If, besides this, you have a friendly Temper and Disposition, and love to see all about you easy and happy, it is a great Step towards being perfect. But still if Lust prevails, and leads you to violate the Wife or the Daughter of your Friend, how dwells the Love of God or of your Neighbour in you? For Charity is the fulfilling of the Law: For this, *Thou shalt not commit Adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not*

bear false Witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other Commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this Saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself.

The Rule which I am endeavouring to establish, in order to enable Men to judge of the Principle upon which they act towards others, is the very same which the Apostle to the *Corinthians* has in effect described in the thirteenth Chapter of the first Epistle; where, speaking of spiritual Gifts, and shewing that without Charity they are of no Use to the Possessors thereof, his Subject led him to give the certain Marks and Characters of that Charity, which he so highly exalted. What then is it? Is it Almfgiving? No, says the Apostle; *Though I bestow all my Goods to feed the Poor, and though I give my Body to be burned, and have not Charity, it profiteth me nothing.* Charity is not a particular Virtue, nor is it confined to any kind of good Works, but it is a general Spirit of Life influencing all the Actions of a Man; it is the very Soul of Virtue, and shews itself in the Functions of it: *Charity suffereth long, and is kind,—envieth not,—vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in Iniquity, but rejoiceth in the Truth; beareth all Things, believeth all Things, hopeth all Things, endureth all Things.*

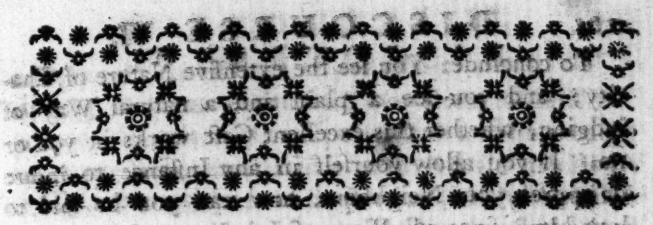
Thus, you see, the Scripture Rule of judging ourselves in this great Point of Charity, is to compare our Conduct with the Precept, and to consider whether our Actions are uniformly suited to the Principle we pretend to act by. We are not directed to consider only particular Actions, or the immediate Motives which induced us to do this or that particular good Office; from whence we can argue but with little Certainty,

calm, and little Comfort to ourselves: For a general Principle is discoverable only by a general and uniform Influence over all our Actions. Men may be good by Starts; may be tender and compassionate more at one Time than another, according as their Minds are softened by accidental Misfortunes happening to themselves: But Charity moves in an higher Sphere, and views all the Creatures of God with a constant Benevolence: It is, as the Text calls it — *ἀγάπη ἀεὶ ὡς* — *an uninterrupted Love*, and which exerts itself uniformly in all our Actions.

When we find this constant Benevolence in our Minds, and that we act conformably to it within the Rules of Reason, why should we doubt of our own Sincerity, or scrupulously examine into the special Motives which attended on every Act of Charity? For, where we are conscious of no ill Designs, no private Self-interest, and yet find that what we do is agreeable to Truth and Equity, why should we doubt that we do amiss? It is therefore an unreasonable Burden to put Men upon this Sort of Self-examination; and more unreasonable to suggest to them, that the Good they do is of no Value, unless in every Instance it be extorted from them by an anxious Consideration of the special Motives of Religion. You may as well tell a Man, that he means not his own Nourishment in what he eats and drinks, unless he has before his Mind an Aphorism of *Hippocrates* to justify every Bit he puts into his Mouth: For, as the Principle of Self-preservation directs us without much Reflection, and often without any, to seek our own Good; so a general Principle of Charity will make it, as it were, natural to us to seek the Good of others, without the Trouble of Choice and Deliberation.

To conclude: You see the extensive Nature of Charity; and you see a plain and a natural Way of judging, whether this excellent Gift works in you or no. If you allow yourself in any Instance to injure or oppress your Neighbour, how can you be said to love him? since all Ways of Injustice and Oppression are equally inconsistent with Charity. Whatever therefore is the darling Passion, which makes you transgress against your Brother, that, that is the Thing which destroys in you this most excellent Grace of the Gospel. What have you then to do, but to root out this Evil from your Heart; to expel this Weed, which over-runs the Ground, and choaks the good Seed? Here therefore let us point all our Examination to discover wherein we offend; let us trust the Good we do to shift for itself, without being anxious to pry into the Causes and Motives leading to it: But let us double our Care to seek out our Failings, and to correct them; that our Love may be without Stain, and deserve the Name of that Charity, *which shall cover the Multitude of Sins.*





DISCOURSE VI.



PART II.



T remains now, that we consider in what Sense the Apostle's Assertion is to be understood, *That Charity shall cover the Multitude of Sins.*

To *cover Sins* signifies to excuse them, to exempt them from Wrath and Punishment: In any other Sense it is impossible for Sins to be *covered* in the Sight of God, who cannot be deceived or imposed on, or so ever delighted with the Good we do, as not to see and note our evil Actions.

With respect to the Judgment of Men, this Expression will bear a stronger Exposition: For, whether we consider the charitable Person judging of other Men's Sins, it may very well be, that his Charity may incline him to think much better of Sinners than they deserve; or, whether we consider others judging of the charitable Person's Offences, it is natural enough for Men to be charmed with the Goodness and Excellency of Charity, and not to see, or not to attend to, the Defects which appear in so good Company.

Which of these two Expositions ought to prevail, depends upon a farther Inquiry; namely, whether the Apostle in his Assertion, that *Charity shall cover the Multitude of Sins*, had respect to the Judgment of God, or the Judgment of Men.

Nor is this the only Inquiry necessary in order to fix the determinate Meaning of the Text: For we must consider also of whose Sins the Apostle speaks; and whether he means to affirm, that Charity shall cover the charitable Person's Offences, or the Offences of other People.

There are probable Reasons to be given for the Support of each of these Interpretations: And it will be proper to examine these Reasons, and to consider how far each Interpretation may be admitted within the Limits of Reason and Scripture.

First, There are good Reasons to be assigned for limiting the Apostle's Assertion concerning Charity to the Judgment of Men. *Hatred*, says the Wise King of Israel, *stirreth up Strifes, but Love covereth all Sins*: Where *covering of Sins* being opposed to *stirring up Strifes*, the Meaning needs must be, that as Hatred perpetually begets Complaints, Animosities, and Resentments, so Love allays these intemperate Heats, and disposes to Peace and Friendship, and inclines Men to overlook and to forgive the Offences of each other. In this place therefore it is evident, that *Love* is said to *cover all Sins* with regard to the Judgment that Men make of each other's Offences. And the Expression in *St. Peter* is so much the same with this in *Solomon*, that it is very probable the Apostle borrowed it from hence, and applied the Saying of the Wise King in Support of his general Precept, *Have servant Charity among yourselves*.

In this View then the Apostle recommends mutual Charity, as the only Thing that can render Life comfortable and supportable to us; and deliver us from perpetual Vexations, and put the Mind in a proper Posture to consider and prepare for the great Change at hand: For thus his Reasoning stands, *The End of all Things is at hand; be ye therefore sober, and watch unto Prayer; and above all Things have fervent Charity among yourselves.* A Man drunk with Passion, and engaged in perpetual Strifes, is no more capable of making a due Preparation for the great Change which is near, than one intoxicated with Wine.

Temperance and Charity are the properest State we can put ourselves into, to wait for the Coming of our Lord. And the Apostle had learned to subjoin this Advice to the Mention of the great Day from his Blessed Master, who had denounced Judgment without Mercy to all such as should be found, at his second Coming, void of Charity and Sobriety: *But and if that Servant say in his Heart, My Lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to beat the Men-servants and Maidens, and to eat and drink, and be drunken, the Lord of that Servant will come in a Day when he looketh not for him, and at an Hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his Portion with the Unbelievers.* In Conformity to this Declaration of our Blessed Lord, the Apostle having given Warning of the End of all Things being at hand in the Verse before the Text, immediately exhorts to Sobriety, Prayer, and Charity, that we may not be found in the Number of those, who are beating their Fellow-servants, or abusing the Gifts of God to Luxury and Intemperance.

Charity therefore, as it naturally inclines us to overlook and to forgive the Offences of our Brethren, so
it

it puts us into that State of Peace and Serenity of Mind, which is necessary to enable us to prepare for the Reception of our great Judge.

In this Sense of the Words, St. Peter's Assertion agrees exactly with the Accounts given us of Charity in other Places of Holy Scripture. St. Paul is very particular in describing the Properties of Charity; and tells us, that it *suffereth long, and is kind, and is not easily provoked; but beareth all Things, endureth all Things.* What is it now that Charity suffereth, beareth, and endureth? Not its own Offences surely, but the Offences and Provocations of others. Men who are void of Charity can be kind enough to themselves, and are apt to bear but too long with their own Offences: But this is not the Praise of Charity, to overlook its own Faults; but it is its Glory to bear with the Faults of others, and to suffer much, and yet not be much provoked. And what is this but, in the Expression of Solomon and St. Peter, to *cover a Multitude of Sins*; to draw a Curtain over the Infirmitie of our Brethren, and to spread our own richest Garment over the Nakedness of our Friends?

Besides, the Expression here made use of by St. Peter, *The Multitude of Sins*, leads to this Interpretation. When our Saviour exhorted his Disciples to forgive Men their Trespases, St. Peter put the Question to him, *Lord, how oft shall my Brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven Times?* Our Lord answered, *I say not unto thee until seven Times, but until seventy Times seven.* From which Answer St. Peter could not but learn, that it was the Property of Charity to *cover the Multitude* of our Brother's Sins; to forgive him, not only when he offended against us seven Times, but even when he transgressed seventy Times

seventy

seven: A large Number; and the larger, because it is not set down to mark the precise Number of Offences, which Charity may forgive, but rather to denote, that there is no Number which Charity ought not to forgive.

Moreover, it is much more reasonable to think, that a truly charitable Man should meet with a Multitude of Sins in other People for the Exercise of his Charity, than that he should have a Multitude of his own to cover. We meet with no such Description of Charity in Holy Writ, as may lead us to imagine that it is consistent with a Multitude of Sins. Charity is the *fulfilling of the Law*, as the Apostle to the *Romans* informs us; and it proceeds, as he farther acquaints us in his Epistle to *Timothy*, *out of a pure Heart, and of a good Conscience, and of Faith unfeigned*. Now, how can the Multitude of Sins, spoken of in the Text, be consistent with fulfilling the Law? How can it be supposed to dwell in a pure Heart? to be joined with a good Conscience? and to have Fellowship with Faith unfeigned? We may ask the same Questions here, which the Apostle to the *Corinthians* does, in another Case: *What Fellowship hath Righteousness with Unrighteousness? and what Communion hath Light with Darkness? and what Concord hath Christ with Belials?* So that, considering how inconsistent these Things are, the Hopes which Men conceive of compounding their Sins by the means of Charity, are in great Danger of being overthrown by this Conclusion. That where there is Charity, there will not be a Multitude of Sins; and where there is a Multitude of Sins, there can hardly be true Charity to hide them.

If you think that the Text, according to this Interpretation, holds forth no great Comfort or Encouragement to Charity, since the Benefit accrues to others, whose Offences are covered by Charity, and not to the charitable

charitable Person, who grows rather indolent than happy through an Excess of Goodness; it must, on the other Side, be considered, how blessed a State it is to enjoy a Calm, whilst the World around us is sailing in a Storm; to sit free from the Torments of Anger and Revenge, whilst others burn with Resentment and Indignation; to have the Mind at Liberty to look into itself, and to look up with Pleasure to its great Creator, whilst others sacrifice both their Reason and their Religion to the Transports of Passion. It is this happy Temper alone, that can bring us to expect our great Change with any Satisfaction. How happy a Condition will it be to be found at Peace with ourselves and the World, when our great Master summons us to appear! And who would not dread to be called from Quarrels, Contentions, and Strifes, to stand before the Judgment-seat of God?

Secondly, There may be Reasons for expounding the Text of the Judgment of God, and yet the Apostle's Assertion may still relate to the Sins of others, and not to the Sins of the charitable Person. But what, you will say, may one Man's Sins be covered in the Sight of God by another Man's Charity? Yes, they may; and in this Sense the very Expression of the Text is made use of by St. James: *Brethren, if any of you do err from the Truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the Sinner from the Error of his Way, shall save a Soul from Death, and shall hide a Multitude of Sins.* Where it is evident, that the Sins to be covered are the Sins of the Soul to be saved from Death; that is, the Sins of the Person converted from the Error of his Ways, and not the Sins of the Converter. And the doing so great a Good to a Brother, as the saving his Soul, and hiding the Multitude of his Sins, is proposed as an Incitement to every charitable

DISCOURSE VI.

FII

charitable Person to labour the Conversion of a Sinner. Join other Cases: It is very plain, how much Sin and Folly proceed from the mutual Passions of Men labouring despitefully to vex and provoke each other; and how much might be prevented on both Sides, had one of them only Reason and Discretion enough to put an end to Strife. This Part the charitable Man is ever ready to act; and when he does, his passionate Adversary owes it to his Goodness, that in his Anger he did not sin against God. This the Prophet *David* saw and acknowledged in his own Case, and blessed the happy Instrument which prevented his Hands from shedding Blood: He had sworn in his Wrath to destroy *Nabal*, and all his Family with him; but the Wife of *Nabal* with gentle Intreaties put a Stop to his Revenge, and saved him from committing the great Crime. *David* no sooner recovered himself from his Passion, but he saw how much he was indebted to his Petitioner; and cried out, *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this Day to meet me; and blessed be thy Advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this Day from coming to shed Blood, and from avenging myself with mine own Hand.* This Speech every passionate Man may have Reason to make to his charitable Neighbour, who gives way to his Wrath, and by gentle and kind Treatment saves him from the Extravagances, which a warm Opposition would hurry him into. And is it not a great Encouragement to put on Meekness and Charity, since by bearing with the light Offences of our Brethren against ourselves, we may possibly save them from much greater Offences against God, and be instrumental in delivering them from that Judgment, which, by their own Bitterness of Spirit and Thirst after Revenge, they would certainly draw upon themselves.

Were

Were we to go thro' the several Works of Charity, and consider it instructing the Ignorant, encouraging the Weak, rebuking the Presumptuous, in a word, giving an helping Hand to every good Work; it would appear, in many Instances, how instrumental Charity is in covering the Sins of others. But I hasten to the

Third and last Inquiry, What Encouragement we have from Reason and Scripture to expect, that by Charity we may cover our own Sins.

In the Verse before the Text the Apostle gives us this Warning—*The End of all Things is at hand.* To this solemn Notice he subjoins a proper Exhortation: *Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto Prayer; and above all Things have fervent Charity among yourselves.* The Reason of the latter Part of this Exhortation he gives in the Words now under our Consideration, *For Charity shall cover the Multitude of Sins.* These Things laid together create a Presumption, that the Apostle might mean to instruct each Man how to cover his own Sins, and to prevent the ill Effects naturally to be feared from them, when the End of all Things should come. When we think of Judgment, of whose Sins do we think, or for whose Offences do we tremble, but our own? When the Preachers of the Gospel warn us of the great Day of the Lord, it is a strong Call to Repentance, and for whose Sins but our own? Since therefore the Apostle calls on us to use the best Means to cover the Multitude of Sins, in Expectation of the great Change that is at hand, whose Sins can we more naturally think on than our own? And if this be indeed the Case, then is Charity recommended to us, as a proper Means to cover or excuse our own Sins in the Sight of God.

Besides, the Exhortation to mutual Charity being subjoined immediately to the Mention of Prayer, may be

be a farther Argument of St. Peter's Intention to instruct us how to hide our own Offences. He well knew upon what Condition our Lord had taught us to ask Forgiveness of our Sins: *Forgive us our Trespases, as we forgive them that trespass against us.* This being the Condition upon which the Pardon of God is promised, what have we to cover our Sins in the Sight of God without Charity? that Charity which beareth all Things, endureth all Things, which hideth the Trespases of our Brother from our Eyes, and for that Reason will cover our own Offences, when the Lord shall come to judge the Earth.

But farther: The Nature and Extent of Charity considered, there arises a farther Argument to confirm the charitable Man in the Hopes of Pardon for his own Transgressions: For Charity is the fulfilling of the Law; it is the Royal Law, as St. James calls it, which *whoever fulfils shall do well.* And in this View, St. Peter's Advice, to have fervent Charity, that it may cover the Multitude of Sins, is equivalent to Daniel's Advice to Nebuchadnezzar: *O King, let my Counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy Sins by Righteousness, and thine Iniquities by showing Mercy to the Poor.* Charity is indeed the breaking off of Sin; it is Righteousness and Mercy; it is the essential Part of that Repentance to which the Promises of Life are made in the Gospel.

For these Reasons it may be allowed, that the Apostle meant to exhort us to Charity, as a proper Means to obtain Forgiveness of our Sins at the Hands of God. But, to prevent Mistakes in so momentous a Concern to ourselves, I beg leave to lay a few Observations before you, which may help to set this Matter in a clear Light.

First,

First, We must not so expound this Text, as to make it contradict the general Terms of Pardon and Reconciliation proposed in the Gospel of our Saviour: And therefore, since the Gospel allows no Licence for continuing in Sin, nor gives any Encouragement to hope for the Pardon of Sin, but upon Repentance and Amendment of Life, we do but deceive ourselves when we give way to other Hopes, and, by the Help of a strong Imagination, wrest the Words of St. Peter, and other like Passages of Scripture, to the Service of our Inclinations. You have seen that the Words of the Text are capable of divers Interpretations, and therefore they cannot be so strong in any one Sense, as to controul the Meaning of more plain and express Declarations of Holy Writ: Nor can we reasonably imagine, that the Holy Writers forgot or neglected to acquaint us with our best Advantage, and left it to a single Expression in an Epistle of St. Peter, to inform us of something more comfortable and beneficial to us, than the general Terms, as proposed in the Gospel, do contain.

Secondly, We must not so expound this, or any other Passage of Scripture, as to raise up a Doctrine contumelious and reproachful to God, or inconsistent with his Attributes of Holiness and Justice. Now there is nothing more reproachful to God, than to deal with him, as if you could purchase a Pardon or an Indulgence at his Hands, as if you could compound Sins with him, and bargain for so many Acts of Charity in lieu of so many Acts of Extortion and Oppression, which you have been, or do intend to be, engaged in. Consider, with the Almighty dwelleth Truth and Justice, and in the Court of Heaven there is no Commutation for Iniquity; no Excuse for it, but forsaking it; no Pardon for it, but by renouncing it. *Go, and sin no more,* says

says our Saviour to the Woman taken in Adultery. You see here the Condition of Pardon for Sin; so essential a Condition, that no Indulgence, no Charter can be good, that wants this Clause.

Under these Limitations then, let us consider how far we may apply this sovereign Remedy of Charity to our own Sins.

We may consider our Sins as past, present, and to come. With respect to our past Sins, it is out of our Power to recall them: With respect to our present, it is in our Power to forsake them: With respect to those to come, it is in our Power to prevent or avoid them. To begin with the last: No Sort or Degree of Charity can so far vacate the Duties of Virtue and Religion, as to make it unnecessary for us to avoid the Occasions of Sin for the Time to come. To reform Mankind is the End of the Gospel; and it is the constant Call of God to us, speaking by the Voice of Nature and Revelation, *That denying all Ungodliness, we should live righteously and soberly in this present World.* It is absurd therefore to suppose, that either Nature or Revelation can dissolve our Obedience to God, or shew us a Way how we may safely give scope to Sin, and promise ourselves the Pleasures of Iniquity with Security. Nay, Charity itself, could it possibly entertain so malicious a Thought against God, as to lay up for itself an Opportunity of sinning against God with Impunity, would cease to be Charity; and our very Remedy, so applied, would turn to Poison in our Hands.

Secondly, As to our present Sins: As it is in our Power, so it will ever be our Duty, to forsake them; and nothing can dispense with this Obligation. We must not therefore pretend to balance our Good and Evil together, and fondly imagine, that our Virtues do so far exceed our Iniquities, that we may safely enjoy

enjoy them. Our Saviour tells us, *that when we have done our utmost, we must say that we are unprofitable Servants.* Where then is our Claim to so much Merit and Righteousness, as may render it proper for us to do less than our utmost, and may entitle us to the Reward of the Servants of God; whilst we wilfully continue the Servants of Sin? Such a Pretence once allowed would render Repentance unnecessary, would vacate the Terms of the Gospel, and, by setting up one new Remedy for Sin, would render ineffectual all that ever Nature or Revelation prescribed.

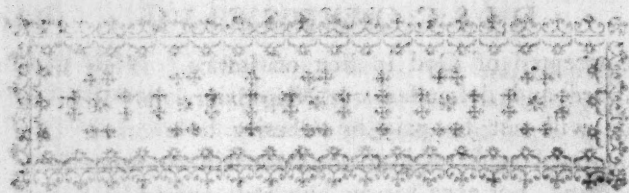
Thirdly, As to our past Sins: It is not in our Power to recall them. Here therefore the Goodness of God has provided a Remedy, that we may not perish everlastingly. This then is the only Case in which we have any Encouragement to seek for a Cover for our Sins. If we are indeed sincere in desiring to serve God and save ourselves, we may forsake our present Iniquities, and avoid them for the future; and therefore to propose After-remedies would be to encourage Sin: But, for our past Offences, we cannot recall them; here therefore a Remedy is necessary, and here the Goodness of God has provided one. Repentance and Amendment of Life is the Remedy provided; and since Charity is the Perfection of the Law, to forsake Sin, and to live by the Rules of Charity, is the surest, the most effectual Way to obtain Pardon. Under these Restraints let not the Sinner be discouraged in his Hopes, that *Charity shall cover the Multitude of Sins*; for his Hope shall be confirmed to him by Him, who is true and faithful, and cannot deceive.

But even in this Case there is need to guard against Mistakes: For, though returning to our Duty, and the Works of Charity, is the best Amends we can make for the Guilt of past Offences; yet Charity will not

be

be accepted of God in lieu of Justice. If we have injured and defrauded our Neighbour, our Debt to him will not be paid by Charity to another. An hundred Pounds given to the Poor will not atone for a thousand, nor even for an hundred, gained by Extortion or Oppression. We must do Justice before we pretend to be charitable, even in this Sense, and refund our wicked and ungodly Gains, before any Part of our Wealth can be made an acceptable Sacrifice to God. It is too common for Men to compound such Debts as these, and to imagine they sanctify their Extortion by laying out Part of it for the Glory of God, as they love to speak; but it is the highest Insolence and Affront to God to think to bribe his Justice, and to obtain his Pardon, by such a Piece of Corruption as any human Court would condemn. Go to any Court of Justice, tell them that you have by Fraud and Extortion got a thousand Pounds from one Man, but you are willing to give an hundred to another who is in great Want: What would they say to you? Would they not tell you, that your Charity was Hypocrisy, a Pretence to cover Iniquity? And shall not God judge righteously, who knows your Fraud, whether you will own it, or not?

In a word: Charity will not atone for Want of Justice. *Owe no Man any Thing*, says the Apostle, *but so love one another*. First pay the Debts of Justice, and then think of Charity; at least, till the Debts of Justice are discharged, do not imagine that your Charity will cover the Multitude of Sins.

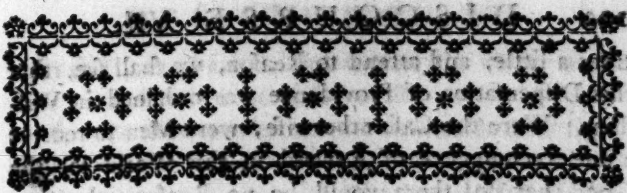


DISCOURSE VII



THEY who are not acquainted with the
GALATIANS, and who have not read
the Epistle to the Galatians, will be
surprised to find that the Apostle Paul
should have written so much of the
law of Moses, and of the works of the
law, in a letter which he wrote to a
people who were called Christians, and
who were said to be free from the law.

THE Text, and other like passages, of
the Scriptures are found in this Epistle
in such a manner, that they seem to be
contradictory to the doctrine of the
Gospel, and to the doctrine of the
Apostle Paul, who is said to have
written this Epistle to the Galatians.
The objects of grace have upon the minds of
men, now as they considered the distant hopes of
heaven, the motives of duty, and the rewards of
virtue, but the language of religion is
not the same as it was in the days of
Moses, and of the prophets. It may be thought, per-
haps, that it would have been better for the Cause of
Religion, if the Rewards of it had been diminished,
and more nearly related to our sins; and the Case
being otherwise, proper in fact a great Prejudice is
done. But if we can take leave of our
prejudices, and consider the matter in its
true light, we shall find that the
Apostle Paul, who is said to have
written this Epistle to the Galatians,
has not written it in a manner
contradictory to the doctrine of the
Gospel, and to the doctrine of the
Apostle Paul.



DISCOURSE VII.



GALATIANS vi. 9.

And let us not be weary in well-doing: For in due Season we shall reap, if we faint not.

THE Text, and other like Passages of Scripture, are founded in this known Truth, That God does not ordinarily dispense the Rewards and Punishments due to Virtue and Vice in this Life; but that he has appointed another Time and Place, how far distant we know not, in which all Accounts shall be set right, and every Man receive according to his Works. What Force the Objects of Sense have upon the Minds of Men, how far they outweigh the distant Hopes of Religion, is Matter of daily Experience. The World pays presently; but the Language of Religion is—*We shall reap, if we faint not.* It may be thought perhaps, that it would have been better for the Cause of Religion, if the Rewards of it had been immediate, and more nearly related to our Senses; and, the Case being otherwise, proves in fact a great Prejudice to Virtue. But, if we can take leave of our Imaginations

tions a little, and attend to Reason, we shall see, that this Dispensation of Providence was ordained in Wisdom. Were the Case otherwise; were Men to receive a due Recompence of Reward in this World for the Good they do, there would be no Reason why they should grow *wearry in well-doing*, no Cause for their *fainting* under the Work, which would so abundantly and immediately repay all their Labour and Pains.

It is natural for Men, when they have before their Eyes flagrant Instances of Wickedness and Impiety, to make a secret Demand upon God in their own Hearts, for Justice against such notorious Offenders. If their Demands are not answered, (and they rarely are) but the Wicked continue to flourish, and the Good to suffer under their Oppression; they, rightly judging that they were mistaken in their Expectations, and not rightly judging where to charge the Mistake, are apt to conclude, that they have *cleansed their Hearts in vain*, and in vain have they *washed their Hands in Innocency*.

Whenever the Hopes and Expectations are raised beyond all Probability of being answered in the Event, they can yield nothing but Uneasiness, Anger and Indignation against the Course of Things in the World: And yet, who is to blame? Not he that appointed this natural Order, but he who understood it so little, as to expect from it, what it was never intended to produce. Would you pity the Husbandman, should you see him lamenting his Misfortune, because he could not reap in Spring, when all the World knows the Time of Harvest is not till Summer? The Case is the same in all other Instances: If Men anticipate the Reward of their Labour by the Eagerness and Impatience of their Hopes, they will be disappointed indeed; but not because their Labour is in vain, which in due Time will bring its Reward, but because their Expectations are
vain

vain and unreasonable, and outrun the Order of Nature, which cannot be transgressed.

You see then of what Consequence it is to us rightly to balance our Expectations, and to adjust them to that natural Course and Order of Things, which Providence has established in the World. We may easily lose the Fruit of our well-grounded Hopes, by giving ourselves up to the Delusion of false ones. If we grow sick of our Work, because our untimely Wishes are disappointed, we shall forfeit the Reward, which patient Continuance in well-doing would, in the natural Course of Things, bring with it. And this I take to be the Foundation and Ground of the Apostle's Exhortation in the Text, *Let us not be weary in well-doing: For in due Season we shall reap, if we faint not.*

It is no uncommon Thing, I know, to press Men to a virtuous Behaviour, in Prospect of the Rewards which such a Behaviour is entitled to in this World; and there is, as well Experience, as Scripture, to justify the so doing: For, if Peace and Tranquillity of Mind here, and Hopes full of Comfort with respect to hereafter, are Ingredients in human Happiness; and surely they are the greatest! these are to be had, and only to be had, from a Conscience void of Offence towards God and towards Man. But this Argument is so little concerned with the external Good and Evil of the World, that it is applicable to Men of all Fortunes and Conditions. Thus we preach to the Prince, and thus we preach to the meanest of his Subjects: One cannot enjoy his Greatness, nor the other bear his Distress, without those Supports, which Innocence and Virtue can only administer. The Pleasures of Life are a joyless Fruition to a Mind sick of Guilt; and the Evils of it are too sharp to be endured by a wounded Spirit.

Thus far we tread safely in promising a present Reward to Virtue; we exceed not the Order appointed by God, who, if he has given us some Desires, which, in our present State of Degeneracy, often prove Temptations to Iniquity, has given us also so much Reason and Understanding, that we cannot be wicked and happy in ourselves at the same Time: How much farther than this we may go, shall presently be considered. But, if Men, when they hear of an Happiness due as the Reward of Virtue in this Life, will conceive Hopes of obtaining Honour, Power, and Riches from God in Recompence of their Obedience, they raise an Expectation which was never yet generally answered, and, I suppose, for very good Reasons, never will; and whilst they pursue this Shadow, they are in great Danger of losing the Substance, the real Reward of Obedience, which shall one Day be bestowed on all, who can be contented to wait for Glory and Immortality.

To clear this Point will be well worth your Attention. In order to it we must inquire what Reason or Authority we have to assert the Interposition of Providence in the private Affairs of Men, with a view of proportioning to their Virtue or Vice proper Rewards and Punishments.

If we view the whole Frame of the World, and consider the great Laws of Nature by which it is, and has for Ages past been, preserved in Order and Beauty; we can no more question its being sustained by a constant and immediate Influence of God's Providence, than we can its being at first brought into Order by him. If we consider ourselves, and how we live, move, and have our Being, it is evident, that we are upheld every Moment by the Hand of God. I speak, and would be understood to mean, literally. If there

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be any thing in the Compass of our Knowledge certain, it is this, that we owe our Life to that Power, by the Influence of which the Functions of Life are performed: Search diligently for this Power, and you will not fail of finding God. If any Man be otherwise minded, let him account for the first Principle of Motion in animal Bodies, and he shall have Leave to doubt of all the rest. But this is not our Point: The Question now is, since God has made Man a reasonable Creature, and endowed him with a Liberty of acting, how far he has thought fit to leave him to his Liberty, and to give him up here to the Issues and Consequences of his own Doings? Of his Power we doubt not; we know he can overrule every Action of Man, and every Thought of his Heart: Our Search is not what he can do, but what he has been pleased to do, and what Method he has prescribed to himself, with respect to the Actions of Men, and the Consequences which flow from them in this Life. To come at any Knowledge in this Case, there are but these three Ways; to consider, what Reason requires, what Experience teaches, what Scripture confirms.

Let us consider what Reason requires. It has pleased God to make us reasonable Creatures, that is, to endow us with a Power of judging, and a Liberty of acting. Why were these Powers given? Was it that we might use and exercise them, and give Proof of our Virtue or Vice in so doing? Or was it that God might overrule them, and render them in every particular Instance useless and insignificant? If this is the Case, had he not much better have made us Machines at first, than have created us free Agents, and then make us Machines by an arbitrary Interposition of Power? Who can account for the Wisdom of God in making so great a Thing to no Use or Purpose, in

filling this lower World with free Agents, and then excluding all Freedom by immediate Acts of his Power? Now this would in great measure be the Case, were Rewards and Punishments to be punctually administered in this World; and that for this plain Reason: The temporal Prosperity of Men depends upon their own Actions, and the natural Consequences of them, and upon the Actions and natural Consequences of the Actions of others, with whom they live in Society. Now, to secure the Happiness of a Man, not only his own Actions, but the Actions of all others, with whom he is any Way concerned, must be determined, so as to conspire in making him prosperous; that is, he and all about him must lose the Freedom of acting, in order to secure his Welfare here. If a righteous Man must never suffer in this World, all the Wicked about him must be restrained from doing him Violence. If a wicked Man must be punished according to his Merit, all who would do him more Harm than he deserves to suffer, must be withheld; and if none designed him Harm enough, somebody must be employed to do the Work. Carry this Reflection abroad into the World, where the Fortunes and Interests of Men are mixed and complicated so variously together, that one Man's temporal Prosperity depends upon the Actions of many besides himself, and it will be very clear, that there must be an End of all Freedom, upon Supposition that Rewards and Punishments are to be equally dispensed in this World.

This Consideration leads to another of still greater Weight: For, if the Freedom of human Actions cannot be maintained upon this Supposition, neither can the Distinction of Virtue and Vice. There is no Morality or Immorality, where there is no Choice or Freedom: Consequently, were the Actions of Men un-

der an absolute Controul, they would no more be answerable for their Doings, than a Clock is for its Motions: And therefore to call upon God to make all things work, by immediate Interposition of his Power, for the present Reward of Virtue, and Punishment of Vice, is a Request not consistent with itself; it is desiring God to do that for the sake of Virtue, which would destroy Virtue, and leave no room for the Exercise of it, no Ground upon which to distinguish it from Vice and Iniquity.

But, to leave these Considerations, let us observe farther, That was Virtue to be constantly attended with Success in worldly Affairs, and Vice certainly pursued with Misery, there would be no room for that Trial of our Faith and Obedience, which is requisite to prepare us for the greater Blessings of another Life. Upon this Supposition, Virtue would not be what it now is; it would be a kind of sensual Thing, arising often from Ambition, Avarice, and an inordinate Love of worldly Enjoyments: Reason and Judgment, the Love of God, and a just Sense of our Duty to him, would have little Efficacy in the Business. Now, since God has placed us here in order to our fitting ourselves for a better World, and has ordained this World for a State of Trial only, it is absurd to expect from his Wisdom and Justice such a Procedure, as would contradict this great and main End of our Creation. The Pleasures and Afflictions of Life are ordained for Trials of our Virtue; and, according to the visible Course of Providence, they really are so: But if you introduce a new Order, and, by another Dispensation of Good and Evil in this Life, convert these Trials into Rewards and Punishments, you invert the Order of Providence; this Life will no longer be a State of Trial, nor the next a State of Rewards and Punishments; for all

future Expectations would be in great measure superseded by the immediate Recompence bestowed in this Life.

Upon this Consideration we may go farther, and say, That the Condition of good Men would be really worse than it is, were this World a Place of Rewards and Punishments for Virtue and Vice. Were this to be the only Place of Rewards and Punishments, the Assertion would be too evident to be denied by any, but such mean wretched Spirits, as would be content to give up their Hopes of Immortality for the present Enjoyment of the World. But take the Case as it now stands with us, supposing only this Alteration, that Virtue and Vice received their due Portions of Good and Evil here, would not good Men be Sufferers by losing one great Support of their Hopes and Expectations in another World? The Notions we have of Good and Evil, the Conceptions we form of God by the Exercise of Reason, joined to the Experience we have of the unequal Distribution of Good and Evil in this Life, conspire to prove to us, that there is another and better State, in which the Sufferings of the Righteous shall be fully compensated. Now break this Chain of Reasoning, by introducing Rewards and Punishments into this Life, and you deface the great Hopes of the Righteous, and present him with an empty Scene of worldly Pleasure, instead of that Weight of Glory which he, upon sure Grounds, expected. And what is it that you give him in lieu of his Hopes? Honours, Riches, Power: But do you not know how little Value true Virtue has for such Possessions? Together with these you give him new Fears of Death; your Honours and Riches will not purchase Life, or Length of Days; and if he receives his good Things here, what Security can you give him, that he shall have any Thing due to him hereafter? Upon the whole, good Men are in a much better State, taking, as they do, their Chance in the World, and
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relying upon the Justice and Goodness of God for a just Recompence of their Labour; they have more true Comfort and Satisfaction in this Condition, than if they had the World at Command, and no Hopes, or but faint Hopes, of future Happiness.

These Reasons seem to me sufficient to induce us to think, that it is consonant to the Wisdom and Goodness of God to leave Men freely to use the Freedom he has given them: That having bestowed on them an Understanding to know him, and to distinguish between Good and Evil, and sent them into this World, as a Place proper for the Trial of their Virtue, he has left them in the main to the Conduct of their own Reason to improve the uncertain Events and Casualties of Life, and to glorify him either through Honour or Dishonour, through Riches or Poverty, or whatever other Condition of Life may fall to their Share.

Though these Reasons teach us not to expect from the Hand of God the good Things of this World in Reward of Virtue and Obedience; yet they ought not to be carried, nay they cannot be carried so far, as to exclude the Providence of God from the Care and Government of the moral Part of the World. It is one thing to turn a State of Trial and Probation into a State of Rewards and Punishments, by dispensing Good and Evil to every Man according to his Work; and another thing to exercise Acts of Government suitable to the State, and subservient to the Ends of Creation. If God thinks fit to prosper any Nation, or to afflict any People, he has a thousand Ways of doing it, without interfering with the Freedom and Liberty of one Man. Years of Plenty are a great Blessing, but the Fruitfulness of the Season is no Restraint on you or me; it is a general Blessing, but it makes no Distinction between Good or Evil, Plague and

and Pestilence are general Calamities; they may and ought to awaken all the World to a sober Sense of God and themselves: But their Rage is not so directed, as to touch the Sinners only; the Good perish with the Bad, and he that called both out of the World will soon make a Difference; though in the Sight of the World the End of both was taken to be Misery. The same holds true with respect to private Persons, God can correct them without breaking in upon the ordinary Course of his Providence. If a Man wants to be bowed down by Afflictions; Fevers, and Agues, and all the Tribe of Distempers, stand ready to obey the Order of Providence: But there is no Mark to know a Fever so sent, from another; there is no Appearance of the Execution of Judgment upon a Person so visited; the Physick may be sent, because it is wanted, but the Hand that administers it does not appear.

Thus much is said to prevent Mistakes: But the forementioned Reasons remain still in force against the Expectations, which Men are too apt to raise, of some immediate Recompence to be bestowed on them by the Interposition of Providence upon Account of their Virtue and Goodness.

Let us now proceed to consider what Experience teaches in this Case. That Good and Evil are not dispensed in this Life in Proportion to the Merits of Men, appears so plainly to all Men of Sense and Reason, that the Fact, I think, has never been disputed. The World has never been without Complaints upon this Head. The Righteous in all Times have lamented their Case; their Hearts have been even ready to fail under the Oppression of the Ungodly. On the other Side, the Wicked, seeing their own Prosperity, have been hardened, and grown secure in their Iniquity, upon the foolish Presumption, that God regarded not them,

them, nor their Doings. To abate these Presumptions on one hand, to silence the Fears and Clamours on the other, has found Work for good and wise Men in all Ages; yet none of them called in question the Truth of the Case, though all condemned the perverse Use made on all Sides of this Administration of Providence. *Because Sentence, says the Preacher, against an evil Work is not executed speedily, therefore the Heart of the Sons of Men is fully set in them to do evil.* That the Case was so, he acknowledges: *For all this I considered in my Heart even to declare all this, that the Righteous and the Wise, and their Works, are in the Hand of God: No Man knoweth either Love or Hatred by all that is before them. All Things come alike to all; there is one Event to the Righteous, and to the Wicked; to the Good, and to the Clean, and to the Unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: As is the Good, so is the Sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an Oath.* But this is indeed a very plain Thing, and needs not to be insisted on; we may leave it to every Man to judge for himself by what he can observe in the World, and he will soon find, that in fact God has not made this a Place for distributing Rewards or Punishments, but that *one Event happeneth alike to all.*

Lastly, Let us inquire how far this Experience is confirmed by what the Scripture teaches us to expect.

There are some Passages of Holy Writ, which, at first hearing, and before they are duly weighed, may seem to promise more to the Righteous in this Life, than we have been able to find either Reason or Experience to justify. Let us hear the Psalmist: *I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not seen the Righteous forsaken, nor his Seed begging Bread.* How! his Son Solomon saw a different Scene in his Days;

then there were *just Men unto whom it happened according to the Work of the Wicked.* Again, *there were wicked Men to whom it happened according to the Work of the Righteous.* In the Days of our Saviour and his Apostles, there were some Righteous in Israel, who begged their Bread by the Way-side, and at the Doors of the Temple. Among these we find some, who had Faith enough in the Son of God to be made whole of their Infirmities: An Evidence, I think, that they were not in a worse Condition than others, because they were worse Men. The Truth is, that this Passage in the Psalms relates not to our present Purpose; it describes a general Case of Providence over good Men in providing them the Necessaries of Life, whilst they endeavour to serve God, but of a just Reward for them in this World it says nothing: *The Seed of the Righteous, says the Psalmist, shall not beg their Bread.* Take it literally, and make the most of it, it will bear no Resemblance to a just Reward for their Goodness: For, if the Righteous and the Wicked were to be distinguished in this Life by temporal Prosperity and Adversity, we might expect to hear of much better Promises to the Good than this, *That their Seed should not beg their Bread;* we might expect to hear of Crowns and Scepters to be given them: But of this we hear nothing. As to the providential Care of God over the Righteous in supplying their natural Wants, our Saviour has given us great Reason to expect it: *Seek ye first, says he, the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness, and all these Things shall be added unto you.* Upon whose Authority likewise St. Paul tells us, *that Godliness has the Promise of the Life that now is, and of that which is to come.* Nay, farther, there is great Reason to think, that God often blesses the honest

honest Endeavours of the Virtuous in this World: But then there is no Appearance that the Rules of Justice are at all concerned in such Dispensations; for the Righteous often suffer, nay, under the Gospel they are called to suffer; for which Reason the Invitation to us is, *To take up our Cross, and follow Christ*. But, to come to the Point of Rewards and Punishments, the Parable of the Tares in the thirteenth of St. Matthew is decisive. The Meaning of which Parable our Saviour has expounded: It represents to us the State of the World, in which the Good and Bad flourish together; and though Men cease not to call upon God for a Distinction to be made between them, yet He, who seeth not as Man sees, has otherwise determined. In this World he permits them to flourish and live together; but the Time is coming, that great Harvest of the World is approaching, when a full Distinction shall be made; when the Wicked shall be cast into a Furnace of Fire, and the Righteous shine forth as the Sun in the Kingdom of their Father.

Thus you see Reason, Experience, and Scripture, all consenting to teach us not to look for the Reward of our Labour in this World, but to wait with Patience God's appointed Time, when the Great Judge of the World will do righteously, and recompense to every Man the Things which he has done.

Let us look back then to the Text, and take from thence the proper Exhortation arising from this Conclusion: Since we plainly see, that this World is no Place of Rewards and Punishments, let us not be so foolish as to look for our Reward here, and be discouraged if we receive it not. If we raise in ourselves such idle Expectations, and imagine that to be good is a certain Way to be rich, great, or prosperous, we lay

lay a Foundation for great Disappointments, and shall be in danger of growing sick of our Work, when our Hopes forsake us. But if we look to the appointed Time of Reward, and give ourselves up contentedly to the Providence of God in this World, and to that Lot, be it what it will, which he has provided for us, our Hopes will never fail; we shall be steadfast and unmovable, knowing that our Labour, however difficult here, shall not be in vain in the Lord: *For in due Season we shall reap, if we faint not.*



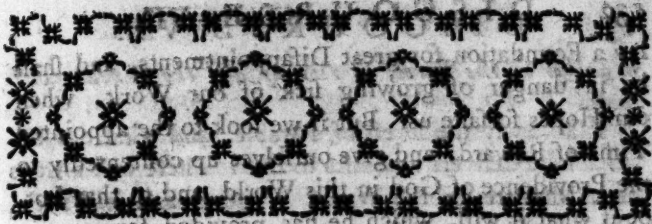
PART I



MATTHEW XIII. 20



DISCOURSE



DISCOURSE VIII.

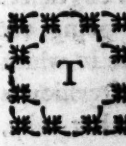


PART I.



MATTHEW xiii. 29.

*But he said, Nay; lest, while ye gather up the Tares,
ye root up also the Wheat with them.*

 O understand the Text we must look back as far as the twenty-fourth Verse of this Chapter, where our Saviour puts forth a Parable, comparing the Kingdom of Heaven to a Man who *sowed good Seed in his Field; but while Men slept, his Enemy came and sowed Tares among the Wheat.* When they both sprang up and appeared in the Field, the Servants, under a Surprize at the Disappointment, report it to their Master; *Sir, didst not thou sow good Seed in thy Field? from whence then hath it Tares?* He said unto them, *An Enemy hath done this.* The Servants reply, *Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?* In Answer to which follow the Words of the Text, *But he said, Nay; lest, while*

ye gather up the Tares, ye root up also the Wheat with them.

Take away the Drefs of Parable, and what our Saviour here delivers amounts to this: There will always be a Mixture in the World of good and bad Men, which no Care or Diligence can prevent; and though Men may and will judge, that the Wicked ought immediately to be cut off by the Hand of God, yet God judges otherwise, and delays his Vengeance for wise and just Reasons; sparing the Wicked at present for the sake of the Righteous; reserving all to that great Day in which the divine Justice shall be fully displayed, and every Man shall receive according to his own Works.

The View of this Parable has, in some Parts of it, I think, been misapprehended. It is intended to represent the necessary Condition of Mankind, some being good, some bad; a Mixture which, from the very Nature of Mankind, is always to be expected; and to justify God in delaying the Punishment of those Sins, which all the World think are ripe for Vengeance. This being the View of the Parable, it is going out of the Way to consider the particular Causes to which the Sins of Men may be ascribed; for the Question is not, from whence the Sins of Men arise, but why, from whatever Cause they spring, they are not punished. In the Parable therefore our Lord assigns only a general Reason of the Wickedness of the World, *An Enemy hath done this.* But there are, who think they see another Reason assigned in the Parable, namely, the Carelessness of the publick Governors and Rulers, intimated in those Words, *But while Men slept, his Enemy came and sowed Tares among the Wheat:* And this Text always finds a Place in such Complaints. And there is indeed no Doubt, but that the Negligence
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of Governors and Magistrates, Civil and Ecclesiastical, may be often one Cause of the Ignorance and Wickedness of the People: But that it is assigned as a Cause in the Parable cannot be proved; for these Words, *while Men slept*, instead of charging the Servants with Negligence, plainly shew, that no Care or Diligence of theirs could prevent the Enemy. Whilst they were awake, their Care was awake also, and the Enemy had no Access: But sleep they must, Nature requires it; and then it was the Enemy did the Mischief. Had it been said, while Men played, or were careless, or riotous, that would have been a Charge upon them; but to say, *while Men slept*, is so far from proving that their Negligence caused it, that it plainly proves their Diligence could not prevent it. For, what will you say? Should Husbandmen never sleep? It is a Condition upon which they cannot live, and therefore their sleeping cannot be charged as their Crime. This Circumstance therefore in the Parable is to shew, not the Fault of the Husbandmen, but the Zeal and Industry of the Enemy to do Mischief. Watch him as narrowly as you will, yet still he will break through all your Care and Diligence. If you do but step aside, compelled by the Call of Nature, to eat, to drink, or to sleep, he is ready to take the Opportunity to sow his Tares; and the Ground, which will not answer the Husbandman's Hope without his Toil, and Labour, and Cost, will produce the ill Seed of its own accord, and yield but too plentiful a Crop. Farther, the Character of the Husbandmen throughout the Parable agrees to this Exposition: When they saw the Tares spring up, they betrayed no Consciousness of Guilt or Negligence; they did not come with Excuses to their Master, but with a Question, which plainly speaks how little they mistrusted themselves: *Sir, didst not*

thou sow good Seed in thy Field? From whence then bath it Tares? Would any Servant, who had suffered the Field to grow wild by his own Laziness, have expostulated the Case in such a manner? The Master, far from charging any of his Family with the Fault, lays it at another Door, An Enemy bath done this. Upon which the Servants, not sparing of their own Pains, were desirous to go to work immediately, and to root out all the Tares at once. What is there in all this, that suits with the Character of a lazy, idle, negligent Servant? What is there that does not speak a Care and Concern for their Master's Affairs? As soon as they discover the Tares, they go directly to their Master, and inform him, and offer their Service to root them out. In this Particular he corrects their Judgment, though he does not condemn their Diligence. And, in truth, one main View of the Parable is to correct the Zeal of those, who cannot see the Iniquity of the World without great Indignation; and, not being able to stop or to correct it themselves, are apt to call upon God to vindicate his own Cause, by taking the Matter to himself, and punishing the evil Doers. The Men who have this Zeal and Warmth against Iniquity, are not commonly the idle, negligent Rulers; nor can we suppose that our Saviour would paint the same Men in such different Colours in the Compass of a short Parable, representing them idle and careless at the twenty-fifth Verse, active and zealous at the twenty-eighth. Besides, as was observed before, to charge the Wickedness of the World upon the Negligence of this or that Part of Men answers no Purpose of the Parable, which is to justify the Wisdom of Providence in permitting the Sins of Men to go unpunished for the present: But the Justification does not arise from considering the Causes of Iniquity, but from considering
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the Effect which immediate Punishment would have. In the other Way, now explained to you, this Circumstance, *that while Men slept the Tares were sown*, promotes the main End of the Parable, and completes the Justification of the Providence of God: For this shews, *that Offences must needs come*; they are not to be prevented without disturbing the very Course of Nature, without God's interposing miraculously to suspend the Workings of second Causes; since all Care exercised in an human Way is too little, for even when Men sleep, and sleep they must, the Enemy will sow his Tares. Since therefore the Parable shews, that Iniquity can neither be prevented, nor immediately punished, consistently with the Wisdom and Goodness of God, it shuts out every Complaint, and forces us to acknowledge, that God is just in all his Ways, and righteous in all his Dealings with Mankind.

The Scope of the Parable being thus accounted for, let us now proceed to consider the Text more particularly; which contains the Reason, Why God delays to punish the Sins of Men in this World, reserving them to the Judgment which shall be hereafter. There are two Ways in which we may consider the Words of the Text:

First, As they regard the particular Case in View, and account for the Justice of God in suspending his Judgments.

Secondly, As they furnish us with a Principle of Reason and Equity applicable to many other Cases.

First, As they regard the particular Case in View, and account for the Justice of God in suspending his Judgments. To see the full Force of the Reason in this respect, it is necessary to understand what sort of Sinners are spoken of: For this Reason is not applicable

cable to all Cases, many Sinners are spared upon other Accounts than this which is given us in the Text. The Sinners intended in the Text are spared merely on Account of the Righteous, that they may not be involved in the Punishment due to the Sins of others: But some Sinners are spared out of a Mercy which regards themselves, in hopes of their Amendment. Thus St. Paul has taught us, that the *Riches of God's Goodness, and Forbearance, and Long-suffering, lead to Repentance.* The Sinners, who are represented by the Tares in the Text, are such of whose Repentance and Amendment there is no Hope; for Tares, let them grow ever so long, will still be Tares, they can never turn to Wheat. And our Saviour has told us in the Close of the Parable, that these Sinners shall certainly be punished at the last; which cannot certainly be said of any but incorrigible Sinners, for *he that repenteth and forsaketh the Evil of his Way shall save his Soul alive.*

The Sinners therefore being considered as incorrigible, there was no room to justify the Delay of Punishment from any Circumstances arising out of their own Case. Even the Mercy of God was excluded in this Circumstance; for, if the incorrigible Sinner be the Object of Mercy, no Sinner need fear Punishment. Our Saviour therefore gives them up entirely, and justifies the Wisdom and Goodness of God in sparing them from other Motives. The Interests of good and bad Men are so united in this World, there is such a Connection between them in many Respects, that no signal Calamity can befall the Wicked, but the Righteous must have his Share in it. It is out of Mercy therefore to the Righteous that God spares the Wicked, lest, whilst he gathers up the Tares, he should root out the Wheat also. This was Abraham's

Abraham's Plea when he interceded with the Lord for the Men of Sodom, *Wilt thou also destroy the Righteous with the Wicked?* The Reason of which Plea was so strong, that had there been ten righteous Persons in the City, the whole had been preserved from Ruin. In publick Calamities it is evident that all must be Sufferers without Distinction: Fire and Sword, Famine and Pestilence, rage indifferently in the Borders of the Righteous and the Sinner, and sweep away one as well as the other. Thus far then the Reason of the Text most certainly extends, and shews us the great Mercy of God in forbearing to appear against Sinners in such visible and exemplary Punishments, which would destroy whole Countries, and bring even upon the best of Men the Punishments due only to the worst.

But are there not, you will say, many Ways of punishing Men without including others in the Calamity? Do not Fevers, and many other Distempers, carry off single Persons without spreading farther? And would not these be proper Messengers of Providence to single out desperate Sinners, in which Case there would be no Danger of involving the Righteous in the Punishment of the Wicked? And if the Wicked are spared only for the sake of the Righteous, why are they exempted from these Punishments, in which the Righteous have no Concern or Connection with them?

In Answer to which several Things may be said: And, First, to him that asks the Question, an Answer may be returned by a like Question; How do you know but that the Wicked are often and commonly thus punished? and that the Thing is done every Day, which you complain of as never done? Wicked Men die every Day, and die in the Way you speak of, some by Fevers, some by other Distempers or Accidents. Can you distinguish which of them fall in the common

Way

Way of Nature, and which are taken away by the secret Judgments of God? Can you tell by the Pulse when a Fever is to be reckoned among the common Accidents of Life, and when to be ascribed to the Vengeance of God? If not, how can you tell but that every Hour may produce such Instances, as you complain are very rare and scarce to be found, and the Want of which you think so great an Objection against an overruling Providence? As to outward Appearance, the same Casualties attend both the Good and the Bad; but he has thought very little, who cannot see that the outward Appearance is no Rule to judge by in this Case. *Lazarus* died, and the rich Man died also: Thus far there was no Distinction in their Fate; the Lookers on could not say which was taken away in Mercy, and which in Judgment: But the very next Scene cleared up all the Doubt, and shewed how terrible a Judgment Death was to the rich Man, how great a Mercy to the poor one: For the rich Man died and was tormented in Hell; the poor Man died, and was carried to *Abraham's Bosom*. It may therefore be true, that God does exercise many Judgments on the Wicked in this silent manner, though it is not in our Power to point out the particular Instances, or pronounce upon single Persons, who are under Judgments, and who not. Now the Objection from the want of such Punishments can have no more Force, than the Objector has Certainty that there are no such Punishments; and since there is no Certainty in one, there can be no Force in the other.

But, Secondly, allow the Matter of the Objection to be true, that there are great Numbers of wicked Men ripe for Destruction, who yet escape all these Punishments, who live and flourish in the World, and at last die the common Death of Men, and, as far as

we

we can judge, go down in Peace to their Graves: Yet still, though this be allowed, the Reasoning of the Objection will not be good, because our Saviour's Resolution of the general Case extends to these Instances also; and the Wicked are often exempted even from private Judgment, that the Righteous may not be overwhelmed in their Ruin. For consider; You see a great wicked Man in a prosperous and flourishing Condition, and you think his happy Tranquillity a perpetual Reproach to the Providence of God: What would you have done? You would not have God rain Fire and Brimstone upon the City for the sake of this great Offender, since many innocent Persons would necessarily suffer in the Ruin? No; but you would have God take him away suddenly by some secret and silent Method; or you would have him punished in his Fortune, and reduced to that Poverty which his Sins deserve. This, you think, would be very just and reasonable, and highly becoming the Wisdom of God. But pray, has your wicked Man no Friends nor Relations, whose Happiness depends upon his Prosperity? Has he no Children, who must beg with him when he falls into Poverty and Distress? There is no great Man, who is not related to others in some, if not in all, these Circumstances. If then you allow in general the Equity of sparing the Wicked for the sake of the Righteous, you must consider their Case over again, and answer these few Questions: Are all the Relations and Dependents of this great Sinner as wicked as himself? Is there not one good Man the better for him? Are his Children all Reprobates? Or, would you turn out a Family of innocent Children to seek their Bread in the Streets, rather than let the Iniquity of the Father go unpunished for a few Years? Till you can answer these Questions, you must not pretend

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pretend to arraign the Wisdom and Goodness of God in sparing this Offender; for you know not how many innocent, how many virtuous Persons may be crushed in his Fall; and when you can answer them, you shall have Leave to judge. Now these Considerations plainly shew the Equity and Goodness of God in delaying the Punishment of the Wicked for the present, both with respect to the publick Calamities, which the general Corruption calls for, and with respect to the private Punishments, which the Sins of particular Men, if considered alone, and by themselves, do richly deserve. In both Cases Mercy triumphs over Justice, and the Guilty is preserved for the sake of the Innocent; which is such an Act of Goodness as no Man surely has Reason to complain of. As to the Justice of God, neither will that suffer in this Account. The Day is coming which will dissolve all the present Relations between Men, when every one will stand singly by himself to account for the Good or Evil he has done. In that Day the Wicked shall not escape, nor shall his Punishment affect the Righteous, but his Iniquity shall be on his own Head only. When the *Harvest comes*, the Master will order his Servants to *separate the Tares from the Wheat*; the one he will gather into his Barns, the other he will give up to be burnt with unquenchable Fire.

Upon the whole then: This Method of God's dealing with the Children of Men is, in all its Parts, without Reproach. Even this Complaint, which is so commonly made against the Administration of Providence, that the Wicked are permitted to live unpunished, is itself a great Argument how little Reason we have to complain, since it shews the Lenity of the Government we are under; and surely it is our Happiness, that we are more to seek in accounting for the Justice

Justice of God than for his Mercy. Were God to be as rigid in the Execution of Justice, as such Complainers seem to require he should be, what should you or I get by it? What we get by his Mercy we know, or ought to know, I am sure; if we understand ourselves, and our own Condition: And for Sinners to upbraid God with want of Justice against Sinners, that is, against themselves, is a Crime which carries with it so much Folly, as I hope may in some measure excuse the Insolence, since nothing else can. Were the Case to be altered, and God to appear as terrible in Justice, as he is wonderful in Mercy, how much more should we be puzzled to account for his Proceeding? As we see many now spared whom we account great Sinners, we should then see many punished whom we esteem good Men: For all are not good who seem to be so. And how then should we be called on to justify the Severity of God; a Severity which, to our thinking, fell alike upon the Righteous and the Unrighteous? For whatever Way God takes, the Thing must appear mysterious to us; for the Faces and the Hearts of Men are often at Variance, and we, who can only judge by the outward Shew, should often be at a loss to discern the Equity of his Proceeding, who judges by the Heart. Should God therefore proceed to punish all who deserve it, we should still have the same Objection, that Punishments and Rewards were not equally administered; and, since we must be in the Dark, how much happier is it for us to be in such a Case, where we think we see too little of the Justice of God, than in a Condition, where we should soon think we saw too little of his Mercy? The Advantage which our present Situation affords is such a Balance on the Account, that we safely defy every bold Objector, and enter into his Reckoning without Fear or Danger; for

for in every Step the Goodness of God shines forth as bright as the Sun at Noon-day, and let those call for his Justice, who are willing to abide the Trial by it.

I observed to you, that the Argument in the Text extends to one Case only, to the justifying the Wisdom and Goodness of God in delaying the Punishment of incorrigible Sinners. It is true indeed, that if this Case can be defended, all others may; and therefore this Argument is by Consequence a full Defence of the Providence of God, as it relates to the Punishment of Sinners: But, as other Cases have their particular Reasons, give me leave to close this Discourse with presenting to you a summary View of the Case in its several Circumstances.

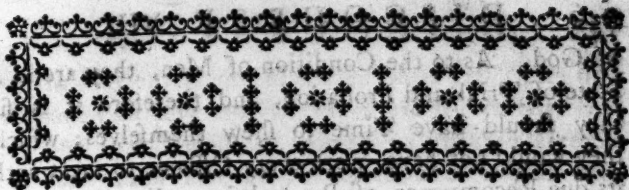
That Men are Sinners is supposed in the Objection against the Justice of God for not punishing Sin; and therefore, in Strictness of Reasoning, it belongs not to this Question to account for the Wisdom of God in permitting Sin: And yet this Inquiry is so nearly allied to the present Case, that our Lord in the Parable has incidently cleared this Point, *While Men slept, the Enemy sowed his Tares.* Such is the Condition of human Nature, such the State of the World, that no Care or Diligence can prevent the Growth of Vice: And as every body sees this to be the Case, so it is confessed by those, who demand a Reason why God does not interpose to prevent Iniquity; for, as the Question refers the preventing Vice to the overruling Power of God, so it supposes no other Remedy to be sufficient to the Evil. But what is it that they demand, who require that God should by his irresistible Power prevent all Evil? Nothing less, than that he should destroy all Law and Religion, and divest Men of that, which is at present their distinguishing Character, Reason and Understanding: For, if every Thing is to be done

done by a superior Force, there is an End of all Law, and of all the Use and Exercise of Reason. It is said to be a Crime, in some Eastern Country, for the Subject to look upon the Prince; and therefore, when he appears, they fall down and hide their Faces. Now this Law or Custom necessarily supposes that the Subjects have Eyes; for should the Emperor blind all his Subjects, it would be ridiculous to charge them not to look on him. The same would be the Case with respect to all Laws in general, should God necessarily overrule the Wills of Men; for to bid Men not do that, which it is impossible they ever should do, is absurd and ridiculous.

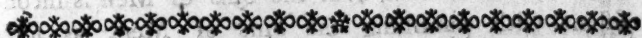
Since then Offences must needs come, the Question is properly asked, Why are not Men as certainly distinguished by Rewards and Punishments, as they are by Virtue or Vice? This would be a mighty Encouragement to Virtue, and what is to be expected from the Justice of God. The first Return to this Question is to let Men know, that they inquire not wisely concerning this Matter, for the Thing is too high for them: For, since the Deserts of Men must necessarily be estimated by a Rule which they are not Masters of, that is, by the Sincerity of their Hearts, they can never judge when Rewards and Punishments are duly administered: And therefore their Reason fails; for a due Administration of Rewards and Punishments in this World would not tend, as they suppose, to the Encouragement of Virtue, because Men cannot judge when there is such an Administration, or when not; and possibly too they may be mistaken in those very Cases, which they think deserve to be made signal Examples of vindictive Justice. The next Return to the Question is, that what they require is inconsistent with the present Condition of Men, and the Goodness

of God. As to the Condition of Men, they are in a State of Trial and Probation, and therefore it is fit they should have Time to shew themselves; which they would not have, were every Offence to meet with its due Recompence of Reward immediately. As to the Goodness of God, it would ill become him to destroy Men, as long as there are Hopes of their Amendment; and therefore to bear with the Sins of Men, in Prospect of their Repentance, is both just and merciful. Thus to bear with the Sins of Men is inconsistent with punishing the Sins of Men, as soon as the World thinks they deserve it; for who can say when Men are past all Hope? But farther, even as to incorrigible Sinners, though nothing can be said for them, yet much may be said to shew, that this World is no proper Place for their Punishment: For the Good and Bad are here so united together, that it is not possible to separate them in temporal Punishments; and therefore God bears with them out of mere Mercy to the Righteous.

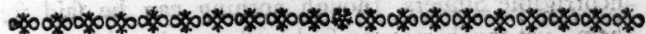
Thus then the Case stands: And now consider who has Reason to complain. Examine your own Conscience; if you are a Sinner, it ill becomes you to call for Vengeance; if you are righteous, or think yourself so, why should you murmur, since it is for your sake that the Wicked are preserved from immediate Ruin, that you may not be overwhelmed in their Destruction? Consider also, which is the Conclusion of the whole Matter, *That God hath appointed a Day in the which he will judge the World in Righteousness*; in which all the seeming Inequalities of Providence shall be set right, and every Tongue shall confess, that the Lord is just, and righteous, and holy in all his Ways.



DISCOURSE VIII.



PART II.



T now remains that we consider the Text,
I as furnishing us with a Principle of Reason
and Equity applicable to many Cases.

It is the more necessary to make this Inquiry, because the Rule in the Text is liable to be misapplied, unless we carefully attend to the Reasons upon which it is founded, from which only we can learn in what Cases the Rule is applicable, in what not. The Mercy of God is the best Pattern that we can copy after, and our Lord has recommended to us, *to be merciful, even as our heavenly Father is merciful*. Since therefore God spares the Wicked who deserve Punishment, nay, who are ripe for final Destruction, for the sake of the Righteous, that they may not partake in their Sufferings, what shall we say? Is it reasonable that Men should act in like manner? that Magistrates, who are Dispensers of temporal Punishments, should release the Guilty, because of the Innocent who are nearly concerned in the Fortunes of the Guilty, and

who must share either in the Shame or the Loss of the Punishment? At first Sight perhaps you may imagine there is a Parity of Reason in these Cases; and yet upon farther Consideration you will find, that the same Reason, which justifies God in delaying the Punishment of the Wicked, would condemn the Magistrate, should he permit the Guilty to live unpunished.

To come at this View clearly, we must attend to the Difference between the Reason of Justice, and the Rules of Justice. By the Rules of Justice, I understand the general Principles and Maxims of Justice by which the Laws of all Countries are governed and directed. By the Reason of Justice, I understand the Fountain from which all Maxims and all Laws are derived, which is no other than right Reason itself: For Laws are not just, as partaking of the Authority of the Law-giver, but as partaking of his Reason. And hence comes the Distinction between good and bad Laws, though both derived from the same Authority; which shews, that Authority, though it may make a valid Law, yet it cannot make a good one, unless acting upon the Reason of Justice. Now between the Reason of Justice and the Rules of Justice there is this great Difference; the Reason of Justice takes in all Circumstances of every Case, and therefore cannot err in its Judgment; but the Maxims of Justice have no Relation to the particular Circumstances of any Case, but are formed upon general abstracted Ideas, and consequently they often may and do fail, when they are applied to single Instances: From whence it often happens, that the Reason of Justice, and the Maxims of Justice, stand in direct Opposition to one another. And this gave Occasion to that proverbial Speech, *Summum jus, summa injuria*; for the Words in themselves, unless you have respect to the different

different Rules to which they refer, are a plain Contradiction. For it is not to be affirmed, that what is *summum jus* according to this Law, is, according to the same Law, *summa injuria*: But the Truth of the Proverb is to be understood by referring the Parts of it to their proper Rules. *Summum jus* regards the written Law, *summa injuria* regards the original Reason of all Law. And then in many Cases it happens, that the Letter of the Law contradicts the Reason of the Law: And the Cause of this I before observed, because Laws and Maxims of Law have no Regard to the Circumstances of particular Cases, which Circumstances nevertheless do sometimes entirely alter the Nature of the Case.

Hence it plainly appears, how liable we are to mistake, as long as we form our Judgments by applying general Rules of Law or Equity to particular Cases. Thus, for Instance, it is a right Maxim of Justice, that all Sinners should be punished; and the Maxim is derived from the certain Difference of Virtue and Vice, from the Ends of Reward and Punishment, which are adapted to promote Virtue, and discourage Vice. Place then before you a particular Sinner: By the Rule of Justice he must die; but what if it should appear, from the Circumstances of his Case, that you cannot punish him consistently with the Ends of Justice, that is, you cannot promote Virtue, or discourage Vice, you cannot distinguish Good from Evil in his Case, but must afflict both alike? What will you say? Shall the general Maxim prevail contrary to the very Reasons upon which the Maxim itself is founded? Or shall the Reasons of Justice and Equity prevail to supersede a general Law, which is not applicable to the present Case?

Now there is the same Difference between the Judgments of God, and the Judgments of Men, as there is between the Rules of Law, and the Reason of Law: For Men are tied down to judge by the Rules which the Law prescribes; but the Judgment of God does not arise from any Rule or Maxim of Law, but in every Instance follows the Reason of the Thing to be judged of; otherwise his Judgments would not in every Case be reasonable. It is mere Weakness that makes Men go by Rules; and because they are not able to judge accurately upon all emergent Cases, therefore they have general Rules for their Direction. But how absurd would it be to imagine God as acting by any such Rules, as having recourse to stated Laws or Maxims for the Direction of his Judgment in particular Instances? As Reason is in all Cases the Fountain of Justice, and of all Laws and Principles of Law, so the Divine Reason, which is perfect, is in every Case the true Measure of Justice. From hence it evidently appears, that since the Judgments of God are not formed upon the general Notions and Principles of Justice which we are conversant in, those Notions can be no safe Rules for us in the Examination of the Ways of Providence, because our Rules do not always extend to the Reason of particular Cases; but the Judgments of God do always regard the Reasons and Circumstances of every Case.

Farther: These Considerations will help us to form distinct Notions of Justice and Mercy, and discover to us, if not what they always are, yet at least what they always should be. Justice is thought to be a Thing fixed and certain, and to have its proper Bounds and Limits, which it cannot transgress without losing its Name: But Mercy is taken to be of a more variable, uncertain Nature, to have no Rule to go by, but to arise

arise from the Will of the Governor: And consequently we usually speak of Justice and Mercy as Opposites to each other, and suppose that Mercy can have no Place, unless Justice recedes to make room for it. What does or may happen in the World we are not concerned to inquire; our Business is to search after the true Notions of Justice and Mercy, not the corrupt Practices in either. Now Mercy and Justice would not be distinguished, were it not for the Intervention of general and particular Laws, which often fall very heavy upon particular Persons; whence it is that we complain of the Rigor and Hardness of the Law: But were Men perfect both in their Reason and in their Wills, so that they could neither judge amiss nor act amiss, they would then do that which is exactly right and reasonable in every Case, and there would be no room to correct the Rigor of Justice by the Interposition of Mercy; for there is no Rigor in that which is perfectly right and reasonable. For consider what are the Pleas for Mercy: Do they not arise from the Circumstances of the Person, or the Action, which shew that the Law is too hard in his Case, and that he ought in Reason to be eased against the Extremity of the Law? But had all these Circumstances been weighed in the first Judgment, and Justice adapted to the very Merits of the Case, all the Pleas for Mercy had been prevented, and consequently there had been no room for Mercy; for Mercy without Reason is a mere Effect of arbitrary Power, and not of Goodness. But now that all Cases are judged by Laws made long before the Cases happened, and which cannot consider the Alleviations or Aggravations of particular Facts, it comes to pass sometimes, that the Law is a very inadequate Rule of Justice in Cases that fall under it. Shall the Person then suffer according to the Rule of

Justice against all Reason of Justice? No; he ought to have the Benefit of Mercy, and to be relieved against the Rigor of the Law. What then, because the Punishment of the Law is too heavy for his Crime, ought he therefore to go unpunished? because this Punishment is unreasonable, shall he therefore escape that which is reasonable? No; for though Mercy ought to take off the Rigor of Justice, yet it ought not to destroy Justice itself. It is evident then, that it is the proper Work of Mercy to correct the Rules of Justice by the Reason of Justice; and, consequently, were all Judgments formed upon the true Reasons of Justice, Justice and Mercy would be one and the same Thing.

Hence, perhaps, we may be able to account for a Difficulty, which is apt mightily to disturb Men when they ponder the Judgments of God: They consider him as essentially just, and essentially merciful, from whence they rightly conclude, that he can never be otherwise than merciful, never otherwise than just; and yet how to reconcile these Attributes in every Case they see not. In human Judgments, it is plain, where Mercy prevails, Justice sleeps; where Justice acts, Mercy is silent: But this cannot be the Case in divine Judgments, because God can neither cease to be just or merciful. But, if we consider that the Acts of Mercy and Justice, as they are distinguished from one another, are relative to stated Rules and Laws, and that they are both the same with respect to the Reason of Justice; we shall easily discern how God, who always acts by the purest Reason, that is, by his own, may be said in every Judgment to do justly and mercifully. For when God does that which is perfectly reasonable, all Circumstances weighed, in every Case, there is no Case in which any one can complain for want either of Mercy or Justice; for, if there be any Reason

Reason to complain, it must be because the Thing, in some Respect, is not reasonable; and therefore, when the Reason of Justice is exactly pursued, you have the true Point, where Mercy and Justice meet together: And this is the Point in which all the Judgments of God do centre. I speak here of the Judgments of God properly so called; for those Acts of Goodness which he exercises in Right of his supreme Sovereignty and Dominion are not within our present View. And that this Account is true, you may partly collect from the Instance in which the Text is concerned: Our Saviour does not justify God for delaying the Punishment of the Wicked, by distinguishing between the Mercy and Justice of God, and shewing how Mercy triumphed over Justice in this Delay; but he appeals to the Reason of the Case, and shews that God did what was fit and becoming a wise Judge and Governor; and that the Thing complained of as a Defect of Justice, was, all its Circumstances considered, the Height of Justice and Equity: And this will plainly appear in the Application we are to make of what has been said to this particular Case.

The Parable, of which the Text is Part, is evidently intended as an Answer to the common Objection against Providence, drawn from the Prosperity of Sinners, or rather, in the present Case, from the Impunity of Offenders. If you examine upon what Principles the Objection proceeds, and upon what Principles the Answer, you will find that the Objection is founded upon one of the common and general Maxims of Justice, which, as I have already shewn, do often misguide our Judgments in particular Cases; and that our Saviour's Answer is drawn from the Reason of all Law and Equity, which can never fail. Ask the Man, who makes this Objection against God's Government,

why he thinks it unbecoming the Wisdom of God to delay the Punishment of Sinners? he will readily answer, because it is contrary to his Justice; and, to support his Reason, he will farther add, that it is an undoubted Maxim of Justice, that all Sinners deserve Punishment. And here, I think, he must stop; for he cannot enter into particular Cases, unless he knew more of Men than he does, or can know. In Answer to this, our Saviour owns the Truth of the general Maxim, as far as it relates to the Desert of Sinners; and therefore teaches us, that God has appointed a Day in which he will judge the World: But then he shews, from superior Reasons of Justice, that the Application of the Principle in the present Case is wrong; for though it be just to punish all Sinners, yet to punish them immediately would destroy the very Reason, which makes it just to punish them. It is just to punish them, that there may be a Difference made between the Good and the Bad according to their Deserts, that their Punishment may be a Discouragement to Vice, an Encouragement to Virtue. Now our Lord shews in this Parable, that the immediate Punishment of the Wicked would quite destroy these Ends of Justice; for the Righteous and the Wicked, like the Wheat and Tares growing together in one Field, are so mixed and united in Interest in this World, that, as Things stand, the Wicked cannot be rooted out, but the Righteous must suffer with them: Consequently, the immediate Destruction of the Wicked, since it must inevitably fall upon the Righteous also, would make no proper Distinction between the Good and the Bad; could be no Encouragement to Virtue, for the Virtuous would suffer; could be no Discouragement to Vice, for Vice would fare as well as Virtue: And therefore it is not only reasonable to delay the Punishment of the Wicked, but even necessary

necessary to the obtaining the Ends of Justice, since they cannot be obtained in their immediate Destruction.

This then is a full Justification of God in his Dealings with Men; and shews his Justice, as well as his Mercy, in not executing Wrath and Vengeance as soon as Sinners are ripe for them. But if this be the Height of Justice in God, how is it not the Height of Injustice in Men to deal with one another quite otherwise? Temporal Punishments, even those which are capital, are executed immediately; though often it happens that many Innocents suffer in the Punishment of one injurious Person. The Law does not consider who shall maintain the Children, when it seizes the Father's Estate as forfeited; nor does Justice relent for fear she should make a miserable Widow, and many wretched Orphans, by the severe Blow which cuts off the guilty Husband and Father. Nay, farther, This very Method of Justice is ordained by God, and Magistrates are not at Liberty totally to suspend the Execution of Justice; and how comes God to pursue one Method of Justice himself, and to prescribe another to his Vicegerents? The plain Answer is, because the Reason of these two Cases is very different. The Punishments of this World are not the final Punishments of Iniquity; but are Means ordained to secure Virtue and Morality, and to protect the Innocent from immediate Violence. Offences which disturb the Peace of Society, and the Security of private Persons, will not bear a Delay of Justice; for the End of Justice, in this Case, is to secure Peace: But this End can never be served by permitting Thieves, and Murderers, and Rebels, to go unpunished; and though, whenever they suffer, many Innocents may suffer with them, yet many more would suffer in their Impunity; and this World would be scarcely habitable, were such Crimes

as these to wait for their Punishment till another World succeeded this. Our Saviour's Reasoning, when applied to this Case, leads to another Conclusion: That the Righteous may not suffer, God delays the final Punishment of the Wicked; for the same Reason, that the Righteous may not suffer, he has commanded the Magistrate to cut off all the Sons of Violence, all Disturbers of the publick Peace and Quiet. And, in so doing, he has followed the same Reason in both Cases, namely, that the Righteous may be preserved and protected: In one Case, preserved from the Violence of the Wicked; in the other, from the Contagion of their Punishment. In a Word, Offences against Men must be corrected and discouraged by present Punishment, or else this World will be a Scene of great Woe and Misery to the best Men: Violence will prevail, and the Meek, far from inheriting the Earth, will be rooted out of it. Offences against God, though of a deeper Dye, yet have not in them the same Call for immediate Vengeance: For God suffers not from the Wickedness of Men; the Ends of Justice are best served by the Delay, and his Goodness is at present displayed in his Forbearance; and his Honour will soon be vindicated in a more publick Theatre than that of this present World, in the Sight of all the Dead, as well as of all the Living.

DISCOURSE IX.

MATTHEW XXVI. 41.

*Watch and pray, that ye enter not into Temptation:
The Spirit indeed is willing, but the Flesh is weak.*

OR the better understanding of these Words, I must desire you to reflect a little upon what Occasion they were spoken, and in what Circumstances our Saviour was, when he made this Exhortation to his Disciples. The Time of his Crucifixion was now near at hand, and he had foretold his Disciples that they should all be offended because of him; upon which St. Peter made a very forward Profession of Constancy, as did likewise all the Disciples. But it does not appear that they clearly understood our Saviour, or were apprehensive that they should so soon lose their Master; if they had, they could not have been so supinely negligent and unconcerned for his Welfare, as immediately to fall asleep, as we read they did. But our Saviour, as he had a different Sense of what he was to undergo, so was he differently affected: He began to be sorrowful,

rowful, and very heavy; and expressed himself to his Disciples, *that his Soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto Death.* He began to feel the Weakness and Infirmities of human Nature upon the Approach of Death, and the Terror and Apprehension of it increased so fast, as to draw that Petition from him, *O my Father, if it be possible, let this Cup pass from me.* In which Prayer he was so earnest, and his Agony so great, *that the Sweat fell from him like Drops of Blood.*

No one was ever more willing to fulfil the Will of God than he was: He came into the World to do the Will of his Father, and was ready to finish the Work set before him. But yet, in this last and sharp Trial, he found how great the Weakness of the Flesh was, and how powerful Impressions it had upon him: From whence probably arose the Reflection mentioned in the Text, *The Spirit indeed is willing, but the Flesh is weak;* which he makes the Ground of his Exhortation to his Disciples, *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into Temptation.* When he returned from Prayer to them, he found them asleep; and, after expostulating with them for the Unconcernedness it betrayed towards him in his Distress and Affliction, he exhorts them rather to employ their Time in watching and praying; for, though they had made a very forward and bold Resolution rather to die with him than deny him, yet he knew that a Resolution and Willingness to obey were not a sufficient Support against the Weakness of human Nature, but that they stood in need of all the Advantages that might be reaped from Watchfulness and Prayer. If he himself found Difficulties from the Weakness of the Flesh, he might well conclude how unable his Disciples would be, when their Time of Trial should come.

So

So that the Words of the Text, *The Spirit indeed is willing, but the Flesh is weak*, seem rather founded on what our Saviour experienced in his late Agony, than from any thing that was criminal in his Disciples. They were asleep indeed, which was an unkind Part, when they saw in how great Distress their Master was, but otherwise it was not faulty in itself. They did not apprehend the imminent Danger their Lord was in; if they had, their Fear and Anxiety would have interposed to disturb their Rest. Nor did our Saviour blame their Sleep otherwise than as unseasonable at that Time, when the Danger that attended them required them to be otherwise employed. There was a great Storm ready to break, in which he foresaw they must bear a Part, as well as himself; and therefore there was a Necessity they should arm, and prepare themselves against it. *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into Temptation*: Which is a Warning for them to strengthen themselves against future Evil; and he does not much blame their Carriage as yet, but rather tacitly acknowledges the great Forwardness they expressed to suffer with him, and for him; *The Spirit indeed is willing*. But then he knew the Greatness of the Temptation they were to undergo, and had lately himself experienced the Weakness and Inability of human Nature, and therefore recommends Watchfulness and Prayer to them, because *the Flesh is weak*.

The Words thus explained contain a very proper and suitable Exhortation to the Season in which they were spoken, and to all Men in general: And the Reason of them is a powerful Excitement to us to pray continually for the Grace and Assistance of God's good Spirit, knowing, how ready and willing soever we may be to obey, that we are beset with too many and too strong Enemies to permit us long to conti-

nue in our good Resolutions; which should make us look about for Help, and, if I may so speak, enter into new Alliances with Heaven, for greater Supplies of spiritual Strength to oppose the common Enemy of Mankind.

But this Explication of the Text, how worthy soever of its Author, and agreeable to the Circumstances in which it was delivered, will not easily be digested; because it undermines the Foundation of the favourite Doctrine of Sins of Infirmity, which, upon the slender Encouragement of this Text of Scripture, has thriven wonderfully, almost to the Exclusion of all other Sins out of the World. For Men are very willing to list all their Sins under the Colours of Infirmity, and so leave them to shift for themselves: Which, whatever else it signifies, has this present Effect, it rids them of the Trouble and Pains of Repentance and Amendment, and eases them of the Terror and Apprehension of Guilt, which would otherwise be very unwelcome Companions to the Pleasures of Sin.

The Text, when used to this Purpose, is thus explained: The Disciples are supposed to have committed some great Fault, for which our Saviour rebukes them; *What, could ye not watch with me one Hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into Temptation:* But then, checking himself, he makes this Excuse for them, *The Spirit indeed is willing, but the Flesh is weak:* Absolving them for the Willingness that was in them, and throwing all the Blame and Guilt of Sin upon the Weakness of the Flesh. Now to make the most of this: The Fault which the Disciples were guilty of, could be no other than falling asleep, and that after long and tedious Watching; so that, if the Weakness of the Flesh was applied as an Excuse to the Apostles Case, nothing else can be understood by it, but

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the natural Wants and Cravings of Nature, which are necessary to the Support of Life ; such as Sleepiness, Hunger and Thirst, which no one doubts but may be so strong, without any Fault of ours, as to interrupt us when we might be better employed ; and, whenever they are so, are without question very pardonable Infirmities. But, if this were the only Use made of this Notion, no one would think it worthy of a Dispute.

But, as some Men of melancholick Tempers and Dispositions have fancied every Sin they have been guilty of to be the Sin against the Holy Ghost, and themselves irrecoverably rejected, and incapable of the Mercy and Favour of God ; so others of a different Temper have reckoned all their Sins to be Sins of Infirmary, and themselves secure enough from the Anger of God, and Danger of Punishment. The one pays dear for his Mistake in this World, by the Fears and Apprehensions under which he continually suffers : And the other will have no Reason to be proud of his Contrivance, when his Error comes to be rectified by the impartial Judgment of God in another. It is a false Security Men gain to themselves by these little shifting Tricks in Religion ; and there is just as much Policy in this Conceit, as in his, who shut his own Eyes fast, and thought no body else could see him. For, however Men darken and blind their own Judgment, there is, who sees through all their Pretences, and will judge a righteous Judgment.

But, the better to enable us to judge of this Matter, it may be proper to inquire, what are Sins of Infirmary, and what Value there is in the Excuse. And though there is no Ground in the Words of the Text for this Distinction, yet, since they have been so often applied to this Purpose, I hope it will not be thought an unreasonable Deviation to endeavour to rectify the Mistakes.

Mistakes in this Case, which are but too general, and of too fatal Consequence to the Souls of Men.

In this Inquiry I shall confine myself to the following Method :

First, To consider what is the Scripture Sense of Infirmities.

Secondly, What Sort of Sins they are, which will admit of an Excuse, because of the Infirmary from which they proceed.

The State of human Nature is such, as to be liable to many Pains, Diseases, and at last to Death : And though all are not equally affected, some having a less Share of these Evils than others; yet all, by the Weakness of Nature, are equally liable and exposed to these Miseries : This is the first and proper Notion of Infirmary. In this Sense Christ is said to *bear our Infirmities*; being, by the necessary Law of his human Nature, subject to the like Miseries and Afflictions with us. St. Paul says, *he was crucified through Weakness*; that is, he was by the Condition of his Humanity liable to Death, which exposed him to the Death of the Cross, through the Malice and Power of his Enemies. Under this Sense are contained, as Particulars in a General, all the natural Wants and Weaknesses of Nature; such as Hunger, Thirst, Sleepiness, the Fear and Dread of Pain, and the Aversion and Horror of Death : Which Infirmary our Blessed Saviour himself was not free from, as appears by what has been already said.

But Men are not more weak and imperfect in their Bodies than in their Minds, nor more exposed to bodily Pains than to the Impressions of Sin, which is our spiritual Disease : And though all are not Sinners alike, yet all are alike weak, and subject to the Temptations of Sin : And this is the general Sense of Infirmary, when applied to our spiritual Condition. St.

Paul

Paul tells us, the Law was weak through the Flesh : And the Author to the Hebrews to the same Sense, There was a disannulling of the Commandment going before, for the Weakness and Unprofitableness thereof : For the Law made nothing perfect. Which is not to be understood, as if the Law was weak, carnal, and unprofitable, considered in itself ; for, St. Paul says, the Law is holy, and the Commandment holy, just, and good : But Men were so weak and carnally minded, the Disposition to Evil was so great, for which the Law had not provided a sufficient Cure, that the holy, just, and good Commandment was made ineffectual. Agreeable to this, St. Paul, in the Person of an unregenerate Man, says, The Law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under Sin ; for in me, that is, in my Flesh, dwelleth no good Thing : For to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. This, and more to the same Purpose, you will find in Rom. vii. This Incapacity St. Paul calls the Law of Sin which is in the Members, which rules and governs in the Unregenerate, and from which we are freed by Christ, as he immediately declares : The Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the Law of Sin and Death. For what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the Flesh, God sending his own Son in the Likeness of sinful Flesh, and for Sin, condemned Sin in the Flesh : That the Righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the Flesh, but after the Spirit. So that now the Weakness of the Flesh is done away, and we, having received the Spirit of Life and of Christ, must fulfil the Righteousness of the Law ; and may, if we walk according to the Spirit we have received. Nothing is plainer, than that St. Paul opposes the Law of Sin, and the Law of the Spirit of Life ; and the Condition of him who was under the Law of Sin,
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in whom is the Weakness of the Flesh, and of him who is under the Law of Life, in whom is the Spirit of Righteousness. Yet some will have St. Paul speak in his own Person without a Figure, that is, in the Person of a regenerate Christian, when he describes the State of the Law of Sin; and have learned to make Grace and Sin consistent, and taught that Grace once received can never be effaced by actual Sins, of what Number or Quality soever, or the Sinner made less the Child of God. A Doctrine, of which it is hard to say, whether it has less of Christianity or common Sense.

In this Argument St. Paul more than once speaks thus: *If I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but Sin that dwelleth in me.* Which is thought by some to come very near to the Case of Sins of Infirmary: For the Excuse from Infirmary is made up of Willingness, and Want of Power; Willingness to obey, and Want of Power to withstand the Temptations and powerful Impressions of Sin. In all moral Actions there is a Proportion between the Ability to perform, and the Guilt of not performing; and the one must be estimated by the other: But, if we consider ourselves as Christians, who do not depend purely on our own Strength, but likewise on the Assistance of God, the Measure of which depends on the Application we use to obtain it, the Terms of the Proportion will be altered, and the Guilt of our Disobedience will be measured by the Ability we might have had to perform our Duty. For, if we fail in Ability through our own Default in using the Means prescribed by God to enable us, the Guilt of our Sins will be according to the Ability we might have had; and therefore the Excuse may be true, and yet insignificant. It may be true, that you had not Power to withstand the Temptations you fell under; and yet.

yet this may be no Justification, because it was your own Fault that you had not Power. The not observing which, is the true Foundation of Men's relying so much for Excuse upon their Infirmities. They are conscious to themselves how violent the Temptation to Sin was, and how much it overpowered their Strength; upon which they ground their Excuse: But then they leave out of the Consideration, how much more Strength they might have had, if they had not neglected the Means of obtaining it. St. Paul tells us, *We are not in the Flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in us*; and therefore we shall be judged, not according to the Strength of the Flesh, but of the Spirit, which we have, or may have, if it be not our own Fault. A Man may as justly be punished for not being able to perform his Duty, when he had it in his own Hands to make himself able, as for not doing his Duty when he was able. And there is not much Difference between these two; for it is one Part of our Duty to enable ourselves to perform our Duty, and all the Consequences of our Weakness and Infirmity are justly chargeable upon the Neglect of it. This is but little more than what all Moralists have agreed in the Case of vicious Habits: It is hardly to be imagined, how great a Necessity an ill Habit brings us under; yet no Man ever urged this as an Argument to excuse Sin; but thought the first Neglect in suffering the Habit to grow up, entitled Men very justly to the Guilt of all the Sin consequent upon it. If we know how to remedy our Infirmities, why do we still boast of them, or place our Security in them? St. Paul complains of a *Thorn given him in the Flesh*, for the Removal of which he thrice prayed; to which he had no other Answer from the Lord, than *my Grace is sufficient for thee, for my Strength is made perfect*

perfect in Weakness. Upon which St. Paul triumphed and gloried in his Infirmary. But how? Not as we glory in our Infirmities, using them as an Excuse for Sin; but, *because through his Infirmary the Power of Christ rested on him.* The Law of the Spirit of Life having then so plentifully provided against this Weakness and Depravity of the Flesh, there can no longer any Colour of Excuse be had from it.

Next to this general Sense of Infirmary come the particular Infirmities included in it. As every Disease of the Body is called an Infirmary, as our Saviour, when he healed the Sick of their particular Distempers, is said to cure their Infirmities; so, by the same Analogy, every particular Sin may be called an Infirmary. Thus David, speaking of his Distrust of God's Goodness, calls it his *Infirmary*. So the Author of the *Hebrews*, speaking of the *Jewish High-Priests*, says, *the Law maketh Men High-Priests which have Infirmities.* But in the Scripture it is no where used in this Sense as an Alleviation of Guilt.

But the Sense of Scripture is the least thing regarded in setting up this Plea of Infirmary, which has been invented and used to shelter some particular darling Sins, and seldom or never for the universal Imperfection of all, even the best of our Actions, in which Sense only it can be reasonably used; but that Men think not worth excusing. The Bosom Sin is the Thing to be defended: In which Case two Things are generally urged, a natural Passion, and the Violence of the Passion. A natural Passion has the same Author with Nature, and belongs to us as we are Men, and therefore not to be avoided. For the Violence of the Passion, the particular Constitution and Temperament of Body are alledged, which expose some more to this or that Passion than others perhaps
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are liable to. But it is the Misfortune of some Arguments to prove too much, and, like an Arrow too strongly drawn, miss the Mark by going beyond it. What Sin is there that may not thus be excused? St. Paul reckons among the Works of the Flesh, *Adultery, Fornication, Uncleanness, Lasciviousness, Hatred, Variance, Emulations, Wrath, Strife, Envyings, Murders, Drunkenness, Revellings, and the like*; then adds, *they which do such Things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God*. Now try these round, they all immediately, or by Consequence, arise from Passions which are called natural, and, as they meet with a suitable Temper, some may prevail in one, some in another; and then either the Excuse is vain, or the Apostle's Judgment is vain, that *they which do such Things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God*.

The Scripture uses Weakness in another Sense, as opposed to Knowledge; as *weak Christians* are those newly converted, and not yet confirmed in the Knowledge and Mysteries of Christianity: But this Sense is nothing to our Purpose.

So likewise Weakness is applied to them who have weak and tender Consciences, easily offended, who scrupled eating Meat offered to Idols, the Use of which the Apostle allows to such as had Sense enough not to be offended at it. Their Infirmary was a nice and scrupulous Fear of Sin, where there was no Reason to fear: A Weakness we are pretty well got over.

These are the most usual, if not all the Scripture Senses of Infirmary; and I think it appears, that none of them have Infirmary enough in them to be an Excuse for Sin. All Sin is Weakness; the more perfect any Creature is, and the nearer it approaches to Him who is all Perfection, the more remote is it from a Possibility of sinning. It was our Weakness
made

made it necessary for the Son of God to come to our Assistance, to rescue us from the Law of Sin and Death; which he did by condemning Sin in the Flesh, and by the powerful Effusion of his Holy Spirit. But to what Purpose is the Holy Spirit promised or given, but to overcome our Infirmities, that the Strength of God may be *made perfect in Weakness?*

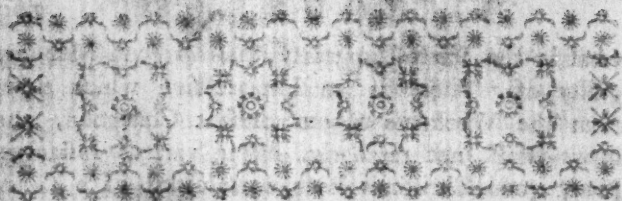
But yet, after all these Helps, we are not, nor cannot be, perfect Creatures. St. James says, *In many Things we offend all*. How shall these Errors be excused, which the best of Men are liable to? Is there a Foundation for an Excuse, or must all alike perish in the Error of their Ways? This will receive an Answer, if we consider,

Secondly, What sort of Sins they are which will admit of an Excuse, because of the Infirmary from which they proceed.

And here you are not to expect a Catalogue of Sins, for I know no kind of Sin that can be otherwise excused than by Repentance and Amendment; and at best there is an Impropriety of Speech in Sins of Infirmary. The necessary Effects of our Infirmities are not sinful: Where they are not necessary, they may be sinful; but why they are called Sins of Infirmary in Distinction to other Sins is hard to say. There is an Imperfection in the Obedience of the best of Men. The five Wise Virgins slumbered, and their Lamps grew dim, and wanted trimming, when the Bridegroom came: But yet they soon made ready, and were received to the Marriage Feast: And, without question, God will favourably look upon the Failings of good Men, and accept their sincere, though not perfect Obedience. This, I hope, we have Reason to allow: But yet the common Notion of Sins of Infirmary gains nothing by it; for let any one say
what

what is the Sin of Infirmary that all good Men are guilty of. There is an Imperfection which flows from the Weakness of our present Condition, and shews itself, not regularly, but in various Instances. Many good Christians have complained of a Coldness sometimes in their Devotion, and of wandering and roving Thoughts; which is, without doubt, one of those Weaknesses that shall be forgiven to pious and sincere Christians. Will you then make this one of your Sins of Infirmary, an Evil that carries its Excuse always with it? Surely no: For, though it shall be forgiven some, it will be an Aggravation of the Guilt of others, who have not the same sincere Obedience and good Disposition to plead in their Excuse. Some are troubled with impious and blasphemous Thoughts, unworthy Conceptions of God and Christ, and suffer a prodigious Torment and Anxiety of Mind because of them, who are Objects of Pity and Compassion both to God and Man: And when this is the Case of well-disposed Persons, who are no ways consenting to them, there seems to be as little Guilt in them, as in a Fever or an Ague.

Upon the whole then: Since there is so little Reason to depend upon this Excuse, and since all Men in some Degree stand in need of it, I will shew you the Way, and I know but one Way of entitling ourselves to this Plea, which is by endeavouring sincerely and universally to obey the Will of God; then shall we be in the Number of those, whose Infirmities for the sake of Christ shall be forgiven.



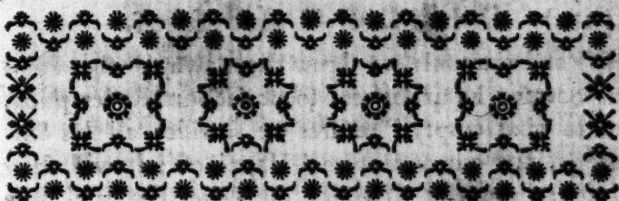
DISCOURSE X.



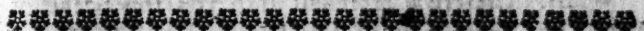
ISAIAH III. 3.

He is hapless and rejected of Man, a Man of Sorrow, and acquainted with Grief.

WHEN our Lord was led away to be crucified, and the Women, bewailed and lamented the Ministry, as turned about, and then said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep for me, and for my Mother, and for the Church, which may very properly serve to our Comfort. Question of our Devotion on this Day of his Crucifixion: A Day it is of Sorrow and Mourning, but in like manner, with Glory and Honour, as set down on the right Hand of the Gospel, as read out for our own Use, in the Book of Revelation. I will now upon a Brief Recollection, we consider with how rapid a Pace he ended in our lowest State of Weakness, and with how cool an Affection we daily approach to it; how we stand fast upon our Account, and how we are to be comforted by that upon which we are to be comforted, and how we are to be comforted by that upon which we are to be comforted.



DISCOURSE X.



ISAIAH liii. 3.

He is despised and rejected of Men, a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with Grief.

W HEN our Lord was led away to be crucified, and the Women bewailed and lamented his Misery, he turned about to them, and said, *Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves.* Words, which we may very properly apply to ourselves for the Direction of our Devotion on this Day of his Crucifixion: A Day it is of Sorrow and Mourning, but not for his sake, who, crowned with Glory and Honour, is set down on the right Hand of the Majesty on high; but for our own, whose Sins brought down this Load of Woe and of Misery upon our Blessed Redeemer. If we consider with how unbounded a Love he embraced us in our lowest State of Weakness, and with how cool an Affection we daily approach to him; how much he gladly endured upon our Account, and how unwillingly we suffer any thing upon his; if we reflect how earnestly he laboured to save our Souls, and how care-

lessly and wantonly, we throw them away; what Pains and Sorrows he underwent to perfect our Redemption, and to what empty Pleasures we sacrifice all his Sufferings, and our own eternal Happiness; it will shew us where the true Cause of our Grief lies, and how vainly we compliment our Lord, by venting our Indignation against his antient Crucifiers, which ought to be spent upon ourselves, who are daily renewing his Shame, and *crucifying him afresh*.

Whilst therefore I represent unto you this Scene of Woe, and endeavour to place before you *this Man of Sorrow, acquainted with Grief*, let every Christian Heart supply this necessary Admonition, All this he suffered for my sake; then cast one Look upon yourselves, and see how you have deserved all this Love: This will teach you how to divide your Affections, to admire and adore the unbounded Goodness of your Redeemer, and to lament and weep only for yourselves.

Many Prophecies there are relating to our Lord, which regard only some particular Actions and Circumstances of his Life; but this in the Text points at no single Calamity that beset him, but is a general Description of his Condition during his Abode on Earth: It begins at his Cradle, and ends with his Cross, pursuing him in every Step, and discovers to us the Son of God through the darkest Veil of Sorrow and Affliction.

Known unto God are all his Works from the Beginning of the World. In Wisdom he ordained them all, and in Mercy he has revealed some of them to the Children of Men. How gracious was it in him to forewarn the World by the Spirit of Prophecy of the mean Appearance of their Redeemer, that their Faith might be armed against the Reproach and Contempt which attended his Poverty, and the great Scandal of his

Cross!

Cross! In human Reckoning a mean Condition bespeaks a mean Man; but here the Case is otherwise: For, when God had foretold the mean Appearance of his Son, his Poverty became a Proof of his Authority, and the Lowness of his Condition shewed the Excellency of his Person. He was a *Man of Sorrow, and acquainted with Grief*; and had he not been so, we could never have believed him to be that glorious Redeemer, who, as the Spirit of Prophecy foretold, should be *despised and rejected of Men*. The Consideration therefore of our Saviour's Sufferings is not only an Argument to inflame our Love, but to strengthen our Faith likewise; shewing as well that he is our Redeemer, as how much he underwent for the sake of our Redemption.

There are three Things then which may deserve your Attention in this Subject:

First, The Wisdom and Goodness of God in determining to send his Son into the World in a State of Poverty and Affliction.

Secondly, The Evidence of Prophecy, that he should so appear in the Fulness of Time.

Thirdly, The historical Evidence, that he did so appear, and that in him the Prophecies had their Completion.

First, The Wisdom and Goodness of God in determining to send his Son into the World in a State of Poverty and Affliction.

The Sufferings of Christ we find often insisted on by the sacred Writers, as an Evidence of the Mercy of God towards Mankind. Thus St. Paul, *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all Things?* And again, *God commendeth his Love towards us, in that while we were yet Sinners Christ died for us.* So

likewise St. John, *Hereby perceiv'd we the Love of God, because he laid down his Life for us.* This indeed was a great Demonstration of his Love; for, as our Blessed Lord himself hath told us, *Greater Love hath no Man than this, that a Man lay down his Life for his Friends.* Were it then ever so hard to render an Account of Christ's Sufferings to the Inquisitive, to the Reasoners of this World; yet, since it is plain his Sufferings were upon our Account, if we consider them as an Argument of God's Goodness, and our Redeemer's Love to us, it stands clear of all Difficulties whatever, and plainly speaks how much our Salvation was the Care of Heaven. Perhaps we cannot see the Reasons that made it necessary for Christ to die, that the World might live: But this we certainly know, that if Christ died, that the World might live, he had an exceeding great Tenderness for the World, and we are bound to him in the strictest Bonds of Gratitude and Love. And, since this Stone lies so open to our View, it shews great Perverseness of Mind, and a base ungenerous Disposition, to shut our Eyes upon it, and to harden our Hearts against the Impressions of so much Kindness, and to amuse ourselves with curious Inquiries into the hidden Reason of this mysterious Love. What is it that your Lord requires of you, but to love and to obey him? What greater Inducement can you have to both than this, that he first loved you, and laid down his Life for you? Could you give ten thousand Reasons for the Expediency of his so doing, yet still your Love and your Obedience would stand upon the same Bottom; that Christ died, that you might live. What Purpose then of Religion would it serve, to know these hidden Things of God? Knowledge will save no Man. And who would not chuse rather to be found in the Number of the most ignorant Lovers

of

of Christ and of his Word, than among the profoundest Inquirers into the secret Mysteries of Providence? Would you see the Goodness of God? Nothing plainer, Christ died for you. Would you encourage yourself in the Practice of Virtue by the Expectation of God's Assistance and Favour? Or would you comfort yourself in your Repentance, and be glad to know that God will receive you, if you return from the Evil of your Ways? Go, learn to reason of St. Paul: *If God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how will he not with him also freely give us all Things?*

Thus far then, that is, as far as we are concerned to go, our Knowledge is clear and distinct, and the Sufferings of Christ afford us such an Argument for Love and Obedience, as the weakest Man must understand, and the wisest must adore.

But farther: Though we cannot enter into the hidden Wisdom of God, and see the Reasons which made it necessary for Christ to suffer; yet if we consider his Sufferings with respect to ourselves, we may discern many wise Ends of Providence in this Dispensation.

First, With regard to his being a Teacher, his Sufferings set him above the Reach of Suspicions. What Ends could he have to serve by his Doctrine, who met with nothing but Misery and Affliction, as the Reward of his Labour? Religions, we know, have been instituted to serve the Ends of Policy, and new Kingdoms have sprung out of new Doctrines: Thus the Empire and Alcoran of *Mahomet* have the same Date. But what room is there for these Jealousies with respect to the Christian Religion? What Advantage did Christ, or his Followers, make of the Gospel? The Master lived in Poverty, and the Disciples in Distress: He ended his Life upon the Cross, they theirs by sundry

Kinds of Death. Nor was he disappointed in meeting with this Usage: He knew before that it was ordained for him; and it was one great Part of his Business to prepare his Disciples to follow his Example, by acquainting them long before of the Afflictions which both he and they were to endure. Some perhaps will suspect there was no Wisdom in this; and all I think must own, that there was no worldly Wisdom in it. Had our Lord come in the Form of a temporal Prince, surrounded with Power and Majesty, often had we heard before now of his Cunning and his Policy, and been told, that our Religion was more nearly allied to this World than the other. But now the Gospel stands clear of all these Objections, from which perhaps nothing could have purged it but the Blood of its Divine Author.

Secondly, With regard to our Lord's being an Example of Holiness and Obedience, set before us for our Instruction and Imitation. His Sufferings render the Pattern perfect, and shew his Virtues in their truest Lustre, and at the same Time silence the Pleas which Laziness or Self-love would otherwise have suggested. Had he lived in worldly Prosperity, and found all Things easy about him, let his Virtues have been ever so conspicuous, his Example would have been extended but a little way. Perhaps poor Men, and unfortunate, would have upbraided the rich and prosperous for not following the Copy set before them; but they would have thought their own hard Circumstances a sufficient Excuse for not attempting it. But what Pretence is there now left for any Mortal? Are you more wretched than your Master? Are you poor, and therefore discontented? Look to him, who had not where to lay his Head, and yet was easy, and paid a cheerful Obedience to his God. Are you provoked

voked by ill Usage to forget the peaceful Duties of Charity? Are you hurried to Revenge by uncommon Injuries? And can you at the same Time think yourself a Disciple of the Blessed Jesus, who even upon the Cross, and under the bitter Agonies of Death, prayed for his Persecutors; *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

Thirdly, With regard to his Divine Mission. His Sufferings were an evident Token, that the Hand of God was with him. He only can produce Strength out of Weakness, and knows how to confound the mighty Things of the World by Things which are of no Account. Power, we know, especially if attended with happy Incidents, can produce great Things; but a weak poor Man is so easily oppressed, that this before us is perhaps the only Instance in which a whole Nation ever rose to suppress one. And what was it that enabled him to withstand the Rage of the People, and the Malice of the Priests, supported by the Power of the Government? When his Life was sought, he was hid in the midst of the Crowd, and was covered with Darkness at Noon-day; but, when his Time was come, he fell an easy Victim: But his Death, like *Sampson's*, was more victorious than his Life; in this only it differed, *Sampson* by his Death destroyed his Enemies, but the Enemies of Christ were by his Death redeemed.

Add to this the Evidence of Prophecy, which is so much the stronger, by how much the weaker Christ was; So admirably has the Wisdom of God displayed itself in this Mystery of Faith. Had the Prophets foretold that a great Man should do great Things; whenever that great Man had come, it might have been doubted whether he was the Person foretold, and whether his mighty Deeds were not the common

Effects of such Might and Power as he was armed with: But when the Prophets declared, that all they foretold should be accomplished by a mean and wretched Man, oppressed with Sorrow, and worn out with Grief; this was a Case that could not be mistaken, hardly two such Men could come; and whenever he came, he would be easily distinguished by the Greatness of his Works, and the Meanness of his Condition. And this leads me to consider,

Secondly, The Evidence of Prophecy concerning the mean Appearance our Lord was to make.

I shall not need to carry you far in Search of this Evidence; the Chapter of the Text alone is so full a Description of this Part of our Saviour's Character, that it looks more like an History than a Prophecy, and may with more Reason be suspected to be a Copy drawn from his Life, than not to be a Description of it. Yet this Scripture was in Being long before our Lord was born, was in the keeping of his Enemies, of those who hated and despised him, and at last put him to a cruel Death, and were at once the Preservers and the Fulfillers of this Prophecy. Here you find him represented as void of Form and of Comeliness; as having no Beauty that we should desire him; one despised and rejected of Men; a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with Grief; from whom we hid as it were our Faces; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Yet this is He, of whom before the Prophet had prophesied: *Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the Government shall be upon his Shoulder; and his Name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace; of the Increase of his Government and Peace there shall be no End upon the Throne of David, and upon his Kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with Judgment and with Justice*

Justice from henceforth even for ever. What Ænigmata are these? Shall he be a mighty Prince, and yet despised and rejected of Men? Shall he be encompassed with the Glories of David's Throne, and yet be void of Form and of Comeliness? Shall he reign for ever, and establish Justice and Judgment for evermore, and shall he yet be taken from Prison, and cut off from the Land of the Living? Where can these Contradictions meet, and in what Manner of Person can they be reconciled? But to go on: After this general Description of his low Estate, the Prophet proceeds to point out some of the most remarkable Calamities of his Life. He was not only despised and rejected, but he was oppressed and afflicted, yet he opened not his Mouth. He was taken from Prison and from Judgment, and cut off from the Land of the Living; for the Transgression of the People he was stricken. And yet he had done no Violence, neither was any Deceit in his Mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and to put him to Grief. His Soul was an Offering for Sin. And yet after this, when the Prophet had killed and buried him, he adds, He shall prolong his Days, and the Pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his Hand. He shall see the Travail of his Soul, and shall be satisfied. By his Knowledge shall my righteous Servant justify many; for he shall bear their Iniquities. Where are we now? Must he die a wretched Death, and be numbered with the Transgressors, and yet shall he prolong his Days, and see the Work of the Lord prosper in his Hands? How shall we clear these Things? Look into the Gospel, and there you will find the Scene opening apace: There you will find your Lord despised and rejected of Men, persecuted and afflicted, and put to a cruel Death and open Shame, and yet rising to Glory and Honour. There you may see this Prisoner of the
Grave

Grave ascending to the Glory of his Father; giving Gifts unto Men, and leading Captivity captive.

Let us then, in the last place, consider the historical Evidence we have for the Completion of these Prophecies, which describe the calamitous Condition of our Blessed Redeemer.

The Way was prepared before he was born. His Conception led to it; since the Meanness of his Parentage could promise nothing for the Child but Labour and Sorrow: And so it proved. This mighty Prince of Peace made his first Appearance in a Manger; and we may well suppose the other Conveniencies he met, upon his first coming into the World, were answerable to this. No sooner was he born, but his Life was sought after: The distressed Parents fly their Country, and the Child is carried into Banishment, before he knew to distinguish between Good and Evil. His Youth was spent in the Difficulties of Poverty, and his Hands employed in the Works of it; and when the Time came that he was to be made known unto *Israel*, and stood forth in the Power of the Lord, confirming his Doctrine with mighty Signs and Wonders, the Opposition to him increased, and every Act of Charity he did to others brought new Sorrow and Misery to himself. During this Time, in which he went about doing Good, *he had not*, as he himself has told us, *where to lay his Head*, When he cast out Devils, he was immediately charged to be in League with the Prince of them. When he healed the Sick of their Infirmities, and forgave their Sins, then he was a Blasphemer, an Incroacher upon the Prerogative of God. When he restored the withered Hand, and cured the Lame or the Blind on the *Sabbath-day*, then he was no longer fit to live: These were such Offences, as nothing but his Death could expiate. Consider
what

what he suffered, and he was the lowest of the Sons of Men: Consider what he did, and he appears, as he truly was, to be the Son of God.

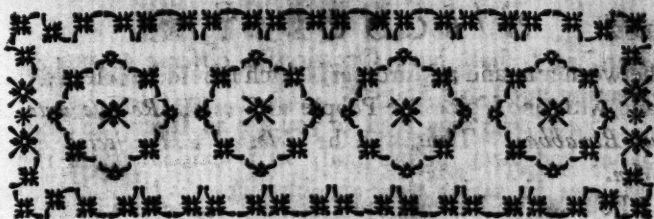
But still there remains behind the gloomiest Scene of Sorrow. When the Powers of Darkness prevailed, and the Time of his being offered up drew near, all Things conspired to make his Death bitter and terrifying. In his Life he had chosen Twelve to be his constant Companions, and they at least adhered to him, and willingly partook in his Afflictions: But now one of these Bosom-Friends conspires his Ruin, and sells him for thirty Pieces of Silver. The rest, though they were guilty of no such Baseness, yet proved no Comfort in his Distress.

As the Danger drew near, our Blessed Lord, who was in all Things tempted like unto us, Sin only excepted, felt the Pangs of Nature at the Approach of Death, and retired to Prayer, the only Support of an afflicted Spirit. In this his Grief he chose *Peter*, and the Sons of *Zebedee*, to be his Companions, that they might watch with him in his Sorrow: But even here they forsook him, and, insensible of their Master's Agony, fell asleep. They were soon awakened; but they awoke only to fly, and Christ was left alone. *Peter* followed, but it was afar off; and he only followed him to deny him. Thus betrayed, and thus forsaken, he is carried to Judgment. When he is silent, he is reproached with Sullenness: When he speaks, he is charged with Blasphemy. Sometimes he is buffeted and spit on; by and by, in cruel Sport, they pay him the mock Honours of a Prince, he is crowned with Thorns, has a Reed put into his Hand, and in Derision he is saluted, *Hail, King of the Jews*. And that nothing might be wanting to shew how vile and contemptible he was to the People, the Question was put
between

between him and a Murderer, which should be released; and with one Voice the People answered, *Release unto us Barabbas.* Thus was he *despised and rejected of Men.*

Follow him but one Step farther, and you will find him hanging upon the Cross between two common Robbers, groaning under the bitterest Agonies of Death. Nor yet can all this Misery create in the Lookers-on any Pity or Compassion. See how they shake their Heads, and say, *Come down from the Cross, Son of God, come down, and we will believe thee.* But neither the Pains of the Cross, nor those Pangs which drew from him that Complaint, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me,* nor all the Malice and Scorn of the Crucifiers could make him one Moment forget his Love and Tenderneſs towards them. You hear no Complaint from him, no Appeals made against them to a future Judgment: Instead of this, with latest Breath he pleads their Cause, excuses their Weakness, and begs for their Pardon; *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

And here let us close this Scene, and return to ourselves with this Question, *What Reward shall I give unto the Lord for all the Benefits that he hath done unto me?* Let us also answer for ourselves in the Words of the Psalmist, *I will receive the Cup of Salvation, and call upon the Name of the Lord.* We have nothing to return but our Love and Obedience, and nothing else is required of us. *He hath borne our Griefs, and carried our Sorrows;* let us not call for them again by our Iniquities: Let them be buried for ever, but let us arise to a new Life of Righteousness in Christ Jesus, that *when Christ, who is our Life, shall appear, we may also appear with him in Glory.*



DISCOURSE XI.



COLOSSIANS iii. 1.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those Things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right Hand of God.

HOW much the metaphorical Language of Scripture has been mistaken, and what Errors and Absurdities Men have fallen into, under Pretence of adhering to the literal Sense, is well known. The Words of the Text are hardly capable of being so abused; for it is not possible to imagine that St. Paul should intend to tell the *Colossians*, or that the *Colossians* should believe him if he did, that they lived no longer in this World, but were, in the literal Sense, Men raised from the Dead. But, as our State and Condition in this World is often set forth in the Scriptures in metaphorical Language, it has not fared so well in all Parts of it, but Men have sometimes lost Sight of the Metaphor, and raised very absurd Notions from a literal Interpretation,

tion, as I shall have Occasion to observe to you in treating upon this Subject.

The Words now read to you are an Inference from what had been before said, as is evident from the Manner in which they are introduced : *If ye then be risen with Christ*. It is plain likewise that they must refer to something which had been said of our Resurrection with, or in Christ : For this Conclusion supposes that Doctrine already laid down and established. To find this Connection, we must look back as far as the Middle of the foregoing Chapter, where the Doctrine referred to in the Text is plainly declared. At the tenth and following Verses thus you will read : *And ye are complete in him, (that is, in Christ Jesus) which is the Head of all Principality and Power. In whom also ye are circumcised with the Circumcision made without Hands, in putting off the Body of the Sins of the Flesh by the Circumcision of Christ. Buried with him in Baptism, wherein also you are risen with him through the Faith of the Operation of God, who hath raised him from the Dead : And you being dead in your Sins, and the Uncircumcision of your Flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all Trespases. From this the Inference in the Text naturally follows : If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those Things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right Hand of God.*

For the Explication of these Words, it will be necessary to set before you the Representation which the Scripture makes of the Natural State and Condition of Man, and of his Gospel State upon his becoming a Christian.

In the State of Nature the Scripture represents Men, *Eph. iv. 17, 18. as walking in the Vanity of their Minds. Having the Understanding darkened, being alienated*

nated from the Life of God, through Ignorance and Blindness of Heart. As walking according to the Course of this World, according to the Prince of the Power of the Air, the Spirit that worketh in the Children of Disobedience, Chap. ii. 2. As Children of Wrath, having their Conversation in the Lust of the Flesh, fulfilling the Desires of the Flesh and the Mind, ver. 3. As Strangers to the Covenants of Promise, as having no Hope, and without God in the World, ver. 12. As Servants of Sin, yielding their Members Servants to Uncleaness and to Iniquity, unto Iniquity, Rom. vi. 19, 20. And because the End of these Things is Death, therefore this State of Sin is called likewise a State of Death; *You hath he quickened*, says our Apostle, *who were dead in Trespasses and Sins*, Eph. ii. 1. The same he repeats at the fifth Verse. Whilst Men were thus dead to God, and unto themselves, they lived only to Sin and Unrighteousness. Sin therefore is said to *reign in them*, to have Dominion over them. The natural Passions and Affections in this State of Corruption were but the Instruments of Sin, in all things subservient; and therefore are said to constitute the Body of Sin, that Body over which Sin, as the Soul or active Principle, had entire Rule and Dominion. Thus we read, Rom. vi. 6. *The old Man is crucified with him, that the Body of Sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve Sin*. And in the second of the Colossians, and eleventh Verse, we are said to *put off the Body of the Sins of the Flesh*. The Members of which this Body is made up are in the next Chapter described: *Mortify therefore your Members which are upon Earth, Fornication, Uncleaness, inordinate Affection, evil Concupiscence, and Covetousness, which is Idolatry*, Eph. iii. 5. This Body is by St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, called the Body of Death, for the same Reason that the

State

State of Sin is called the State of Death : *O wretched Man that I am, who shall deliver me from the Body of this Death ; or, as the Margin renders it, from this Body of Death !* Ch. vii. 24. The Body together with the Soul, which is the active Principle of Life, and the Influencer and Director of the Body and all its Motions, constitutes the Man. From hence therefore, by an easy and natural Metaphor, these depraved Appetites and Affections, which are the Instruments or Members of Sin, and which compose the Body of Sin, together with the evil Principle ruling in us, and directing these Affections in the Pursuit of all Unclean-ness and Iniquity, and which is called *Sin*, are said in Scripture to be the *Old Man* ; the Man which only lived before the Regeneration by Christ Jesus. Thus, *Rom. vi. 6. The old Man is crucified with him, that the Body of Sin might be destroyed.* And the *Ephesians*, Ch. iv. 22. are exhorted to *put off, concerning their former Conversation, the old Man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful Lusts.* This is the State of Nature, according to the Representation and Language of Holy Scripture : And it is easy to see what must become of this *old Man*, this Man of Sin, upon the Appearance of Christ Jesus, who came to destroy the Works of the Devil, to give Light and Life to those who sat in the Shadow of Darkness and Death ; he and his Works must be destroyed to make way for the Spirit of Righteousness, and his holy Works. But thus to destroy the old Man, to root out all the corrupt Affections of Nature, and to implant a new Principle of Life and Holiness, to restore the decayed Image of God, to give new Desires to the Soul, new Affections to the Heart ; what is it but to new-make the Man, and by a second Creation to restore him to the Rights and Privileges of the first, which were long since forfeited

feited by Sin and Disobedience? For this Reason the Christian is said to be a new Creature: *If any Man be in Christ, he is a new Creature,* 2 Cor. v. 17. *In Christ Jesus neither Circumcision availeth any Thing, nor Uncircumcision, but a new Creature,* Gal. vi. 15. In the second Chapter of the *Ephesians*, we are said to be *the Workmanship of God, created in Christ Jesus unto good Works.* And in the fourth Chapter, ver. 23 and 24, we are said *to be renewed in the Spirit of our Mind: To put on the new Man, which after God is created in Righteousness and true Holiness.* Nay, we are said even to put on Christ, from the Similitude of Will and Affections between Christ and his true Members: *As many of you as have been baptized,* says the Apostle to the *Galatians*, *have put on Christ,* Chap. iii. 27.

From this Account it is easy to understand the Propriety of the Words or Phrases made use of to express these two Conditions. Sometimes we read, that we were *dead* before the Knowledge of Christ: Sometimes, that *we died* and *were buried with Christ*: Again, *that we rose with Christ, and are alive in him.* Now, to be *dead* before the Coming of Christ, and yet to *dise* with Christ after his Coming, and yet still to be *alive* in Christ, may seem to be Assertions inconsistent with respect to the same Person: And so indeed they are. But, if we take the same View of Man that the Scripture does, the Inconsistency will soon vanish. Man was at first created after the Image and Likeness of God, with a Rectitude of Mind and Will, with Inclinations adapted to his true Happiness, and subject to the Influence and Direction of Reason: This was Man after the Image of God. But, upon Disobedience, Man became a quite different Person; his Understanding was darkened, his Will corrupted, his Inclinations distorted to the Pursuit of Evil continually. This Change was a real Death of the Man created
after

after the Image of God ; he could no longer exercise any of the Functions proper to his Life, but lay buried under the Ruins of Sin and Iniquity : And this was the Death of the World before the Knowledge of Christ. What then was the Life of the World at the Coming of Christ ? It was the Life of Sin ; of the earthly Man, made not in the Image of God, but after the Likeness of the Son of Disobedience. To destroy this Man of Sin, Christ came into the World ; and *they that are Christ's have crucified the Flesh, with the Affections and Lusts*, Gal. v. 24. And thus, with respect to the Life we had at the Coming of Christ, which was the Life of Sin, we are said to *die with Christ*, and to be *buried with him* ; because we renounce that Life, and the Affections proper to it. Thus dying to Sin, we begin again to live unto God, and unto true Holiness : And this is a Resurrection of the Man made after the Image of God, which before was dead in Trespasses ; and therefore we are said to be made *alive in Christ*, and to *rise together with him*.

Farther : This Change was what we had not Power so much as to wish for, or desire for ourselves : It was undertaken and effected by Christ alone ; he took our Nature and our Iniquities upon himself, and underwent Death in the behalf of all : He dying therefore upon the Cross for all, all are said to be crucified with him. *He*, as the Apostle to the *Hebrews* tells us, *tasted Death for every Man*, Heb. ii. 9. And it is St. Paul's Inference, *that if one died for all, then were all dead*, 2 Cor. v. 14. And the Way to attain to the Benefits of the Death of Christ, is, as we learn from the same Apostle in his Epistle to the *Philippians*, *to be conformable unto his Death*. This Conformity consists, as we have already seen, in dying to Sin, and the Affections of it ; in putting off the old Man, in
putting

putting on the new Man, who is created after Righteousness. This St. Paul, in the sixth of the *Romans*, styles, *being planted in the Likeness of his Death*, and *being planted in the Likeness of his Resurrection*. To this likewise he plainly refers in the 29th Verse of the eighth Chapter: *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the Image of his Son, that he might be the First-born among many Brethren*. There are many Precepts likewise in Scripture, founded upon this Notion of our Conformity with Christ. The Text is one Instance: Another you have in the thirteenth of the *Romans*; *But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not Provision for the Flesh to fulfil the Lust thereof*. And again; *How shall we, who are dead to Sin, live any longer therein?* And many other Places there are, which must be opened with this Key.

Nay, the very Essence of Christianity consists in this Conformity with Christ; and therefore Baptism, which is our Admission to the Gospel, is nothing else but a solemn taking upon ourselves this Conformity. This we learn from St. Paul in the sixth of the *Romans*: *Know ye not*, says he, *that so many of us as were baptized in Jesus Christ, were baptized into his Death? Therefore we are buried with him by Baptism into Death; that like as Christ was raised up from the Dead by the Glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in Newness of Life*, Chap. iii. 4. To walk in Newness of Life, is our Conformity to the Resurrection of Christ, which was to new Life and Glory. For thus the Apostle presses the Argument: *Christ being raised from the Dead, dieth no more: Death hath no more Dominion over him. Likewise reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto Sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not Sin therefore reign in your mortal Body*, ver. 9, 11, 12. As the Resurrection
of

of Christ was to perpetual Life, never more to be exposed to Death; so must our first Resurrection, according to this Pattern, be to perpetual Holiness, and a constant Freedom from Sin.

If we bear in our Minds this Account of the Scripture Language, and of the Reasons upon which it is founded, it will be a Key to open unto us the Meaning of many, otherwise intricate, Passages of Scripture. For Instance: We shall not be to seek, when we find mention made of two Deaths which we must undergo, of two Resurrections which we must partake in: We shall easily distinguish between the natural Death of the Body, and the Death unto Sin; between the Resurrection to Life eternal hereafter, and the Resurrection to Holiness and Righteousness in this present World. *I am crucified to the World,* says St. Paul, *and the World to me. Whosoever is born of God,* says St. John, *i. e.* whoever is begotten to this new Life in Christ by the Power of God, *overcometh the World.* St. Paul tells us, that the Spirit of God will *quicken our mortal Bodies*, as well as our dead Bodies. Which is not to be understood without having Recourse to the first Resurrection, which is to a new Life of Holiness here, and which must be the Forerunner and Introducer of the second Resurrection to Glory. The Apostle to the *Philippians* tells us, that he willingly suffered the Loss of all things, *that he might know Christ and the Power of his Resurrection.* And this he desired to know, *that he might attain to the Resurrection of the Dead,* Phil. iii. 10, 11. Where, if you remember what has been said of our being made conformable to the Death and Resurrection of Christ, by rising to Holiness and Righteousness, you will not be at a loss to understand what it is to *know*, or *feel*, *the Power of Christ's Resurrection;*

Resurrection; or to understand, how the knowing the Power of Christ's Resurrection should be a Means of attaining to the Resurrection of the Dead. Such is the Power of Christ's Resurrection, that those who feel it have, as the Apostle in the 20th Verse informs us, *their Conversation in Heaven; whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.* This, which St. Paul calls knowing the Power of Christ's Resurrection, and having our Conversation in Heaven, the Author to the *Hebrews* calls, *Tasting the Powers of the World to come*, Heb. vi. 5. The Resurrection is indeed one of the Powers of the World to come, which all partake in, and taste of, whose mortal Bodies are quickened by the Spirit of God. In the Verse after this it is said, that those who fall from their Faith, *crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to open Shame.* How does he who falls away crucify Christ, or put him to open Shame? This cannot be understood, but by having Recourse to the Scripture Representation already explained. But, if we remember that all who are baptized crucify the old Man with his Deeds; that they put on the new Man created after Holiness; that the Apostle to the *Galatians* expressly says, *that as many as are baptized put on Christ*; it will readily appear, why it is that those who fall away crucify Christ afresh: For, by receiving the Faith, they put on Christ, and crucified the old Man and his Deeds; but if they desert the Faith, and return to their former Deeds, and again put on the old Man, they do then crucify Christ again with his Deeds, and put him once more to open Shame.

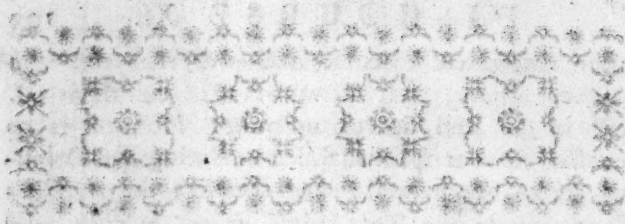
This Notion of the different States and Conditions of Man, of the Death of the old Man, of a new Creature in Christ, runs through the Precepts, Exhortations,

Exhortations, and Doctrines of the Gospel, which cannot be understood but by Analogy to this Notion; and therefore I hope I may be excused in spending so much of your Time in the Illustration of it. You have heard already of our Death, and Burial, and Resurrection with Christ: But the Apostle in the Text carries the Metaphor still one Degree higher; *If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right Hand of God.* As if he had said, It is not enough that ye are risen from the Dead with Christ, you must also ascend after him into Heaven; for there is your Life hid in Christ, there are your true Riches, and thither must you go to take care of them. You are dead to the World, and can no longer live to it; your Life is spiritual and heavenly: As is your Life, such must be the Actions which flow from it, the Inclinations that attend it. Since therefore you are dead to the World, alive to Christ through the Spirit of Holiness, you must act like Members of Christ, and set your Affections on Things above, where Christ your Life is ascended. Hence it is that St. Paul often exclaims against the Absurdity of a Christian's living in Sin. You may just as well say, that all the Actions of Life may be performed in the Grave, when a Man is dead and buried, as say that a Christian may continue in Sin: For the Christian has crucified and buried the Body of Sin. How then, as the Apostle cries out, *shall we who are dead to Sin continue any longer therein?* Sin is the only Poison by which the Life of Christ, which is in us, may be destroyed. It is a Life which no Man can take from you but yourself. Those who kill the Body cannot reach it: Not all the Powers of Darkness, Sin only excepted, can separate Believers and our Lord. But every unmortified Lust,
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every unsubdued Vice, is a Cancer that eats into our very Vitals, and, if we do not cut them off, will in the End destroy us quite. Holiness is as necessary to our spiritual Life, as Eating and Drinking are to our natural; and therefore the Apostle's Conclusion in the Text is just, *If we be risen with Christ, if we live with him, we must seek the Things which are above.*





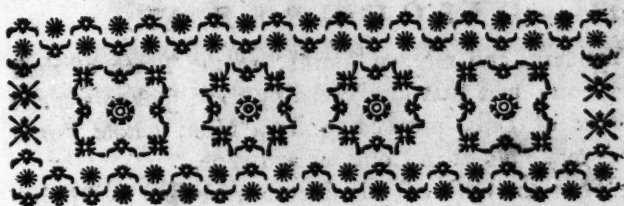
DISCOURSE XII.



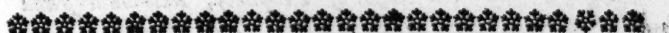
JAMES III.

Of Wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without Partiality, and without Hypocrisy.

THESE fruits of the Holy Spirit are, wisdom, peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without Partiality, and without Hypocrisy. The fruits of the Holy Spirit are, wisdom, peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without Partiality, and without Hypocrisy. The fruits of the Holy Spirit are, wisdom, peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without Partiality, and without Hypocrisy.

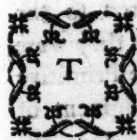


DISCOURSE XII.



JAMES iii. 17.

The Wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of Mercy and good Fruits, without Partiality, and without Hypocrisy.

 HE Gifts of the Holy Spirit are distinguishable into two Kinds, being either extraordinary, and peculiar to some Times and Persons; and given, not for the Sanctification of the Men on whom they are bestowed, but for the Edification of the Church, which is the Body of Christ: Or they are common to all Times of the Gospel, and necessary to perfect the Man of God in every good Work; and therefore tendered to all, who undertake the Conditions of Christianity, according to the Promise of God made through Christ Jesus. Of the first Sort were those wonderful Gifts bestowed on the Apostles, and first Planters of Christianity, by which they were enabled to convey the Knowledge of the Salvation of God to Men of all Languages, and to convince the World by Signs, and

Wonders, and mighty Works, of the Truth of their Mission; and that the Word by them spoken was the Word of Life, proceeding from Him, whose Power was made use of in Confirmation of it.

That the Gifts of this sort conveyed no sanctifying Grace to the Receiver, is evident from what St. Paul has taught us, 1 Cor. xiii. *Though I speak with the Tongue of Men and of Angels, and have not Charity, I am become as sounding Brass, or a tinkling Cymbal. Though I have the Gift of Prophecy, and understand all Mysteries, and all Knowledge, and though I have all Faith, so that I could remove Mountains, and have no Charity, I am nothing.* The Supposition here made, that the Exercise of these Gifts may consist with a want of Charity, i. e. with the want of the moral Qualifications of a Christian, warrants the Conclusion, That these Gifts do not convey the sanctifying Grace of the Gospel; and that they are given, not for the sake of the Receivers, but for the sake of others, who through their Ministry are to be converted to the Knowledge of the Truth. For this Reason they were given, and for some Time continued in the Primitive Church, to make way for the Acknowledgment of Christ, and for the Conviction of Unbelievers; and may be again renewed, whenever God shall think fit visibly to interpose in the farther Propagation of his Gospel in the Heathen World.

It is manifest then, that the Scripture ascribes to the Spirit of God a twofold Operation in the Work of the Gospel. The first is that already mentioned, and is the supplying and furnishing Motives of Credibility, and proper Means to establish the Doctrine and Faith. The second is that now to be considered in explaining the Words of the Text, to wit, the affording Assistance and Strength to all, who undertake the Conditions

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of the Gospel, to perform them, and to render a Service worthy of the Gospel, and acceptable to our God and Saviour.

The *Wisdom* mentioned in the Text is described to be the *Wisdom that is from above*, that is, which is given or communicated from above. And in the first Chapter the Apostle instructs us how to obtain it: *If any of you lack Wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all Men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him: But let him ask in Faith.* And soon after he shews us upon what Grounds his Advice stands: *Every good and every perfect Gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no Variableness, neither Shadow of turning.*

The Instruction given, that we should ask this *Wisdom in Faith*; the Reason assigned to support this Faith, that with God is no *Variableness, neither Shadow of turning*; do sufficiently shew, that the *Wisdom* which we are encouraged to ask for, is no other than the *Grace* promised under the Gospel: For the Declaration of God's Purpose to give this *Wisdom*, which is no where declared but in the Gospel, must be supposed, before the Immutability of his Purpose can be alledged, as a Ground of Hope and Assurance to obtain the good Gift by the Prayer of Faith.

By the Word *Wisdom* then in the Text we must understand the *Grace* of God promised in the Gospel, and considered in Scripture as the ruling and governing Principle in the Disciples of Christ: That Principle of Holiness by which they are enabled to *mortify the Deeds of the Flesh*; by which they *do no Sin, and are alive to Righteousness*: Elsewhere spoken of as *the Spirit of Christ dwelling in them*, and by which their mortal Bodies are quickened; and described as so necessary to a Christian, that the Apostle to the

Romans has affirmed, *If any Man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.*

This Grace is called *Wisdom*, upon the same Account that the *Fear of the Lord* is said to be the *Beginning of Wisdom*; because the *Wisdom of Man* consisteth in the Obedience of God, in whose Hand are the Issues of Life and Death; and not upon the Account of any Degrees of Knowledge, either sacred or civil, which it is supposed to convey. The Fruits ascribed to this *Wisdom* in the Text are all moral Qualifications: It is pure, and peaceable, and gentle, full of Mercy, and the like; of the Learning and Knowledge which proceed from it, we read nothing. The Knowledge of Mysteries, and Things sacred, may be reckoned among the extraordinary Gifts of the Spirit, and are mentioned as such by *St. Paul* in the Passage of his Epistle to the *Corinthians* already alledged: But he speaks of them as not necessarily inferring Charity, and consequently as distinct Gifts from that Grace, or *Wisdom*, which is pure, and peaceable, and full of Mercy.

The Gifts of the Spirit, considered with respect to the Author of them, and the Motives inducing him to bestow them, are properly styled the *Grace of God*; for of his own Will began he us with the Word of Truth, and of his own Will it is that he enableth us to run the Course that is set before us: So that our Confidence is, to use the Language of *St. Paul*, that he which hath begun a good Work in us, will perform it until the Day of *Jesus Christ*. But, considered with respect to their Influence on the Receiver, they are, by *St. James* in the Text, styled *Wisdom*, as correcting the Depravity of Nature, and enabling Men to become wise unto Salvation.

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The Gifts of God are free, and he bestoweth them as seemeth best to his Wisdom. If he gives to one more liberally than to another, yet he who receives least has Reason to be thankful, and no Reason to demand an Account of God of the unequal Distribution of his Favour. Were the Gifts therefore of the Spirit to be considered as special Favours only granted to some, we should not be obliged, by the Terms of our Religion, to render an Account of God's proceeding herein. But the Promise of the Spirit being general to all Christians, and represented in Scripture as the Purchase of Christ's Obedience to the Will of his Father, and as a Principle of new Life; by which they who were dead in Sin are made alive to Righteousness; it is evident that we cannot account for our being Christians, without shewing a Reason for the Necessity of Grace to render our Hopes and Assurances of Salvation effectual.

This is a Point in which there is an essential Difference between the Gospel, and mere Natural Religion; and it is consequent to another Point of Difference relating to the State and Condition of Mankind before the Gospel. If Men were in that State of original Purity in which God must, in Justice to his divine Attributes, be supposed to have made them, it will be hard to say what Grace was wanting to enable them to attain the End of their Creation. If they have fallen from that State, and contracted a Corruption not to be cured by natural Means, it will be hard for any Man to dispute against the Grace of God, without having a Reason to produce, that shall render it impossible, or improper, for God to redeem the World. For, the Fall of Man supposed, it is more reasonable to think, because it is far more honourable to God, that he should destroy the

Power of Sin by communicating a new Principle of Holiness, in order to the Salvation of the World, than that he should honour Sin so far, as to render Sinners both glorious and immortal. Since then there can be no Redemption, but either by destroying Sin, or by granting Happiness to Sinners, unreformed Sinners, it is easy to judge which Method is most suitable to the Wisdom of God, who is of purer Eyes than to behold Iniquity.

It will be one Means of shewing the Necessity of Grace, to shew the Effects ascribed to it in Scripture. For the Spirit of God is certainly given for the sake of those Effects, which were to be produced by it in true Believers: And he that can prove that the same Effects generally are, or may be, attained by the mere Strength of Nature, will give the best Argument against the Necessity of Grace in order to Salvation. For, if Men are naturally inclined to Virtue and Holiness, they will not want Grace to make them so. But this has never yet been the Case; and if we may judge of those who shall be after us, by ourselves, and those who have lived before us, this never will be the Case.

Now the Works of the Spirit are described to us in many Places of Scripture. They are in the Text set forth to be *pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of Mercy and good Fruits, without Partiality, and without Hypocrisy.* The Apostle to the Galatians, Chap. v. 22. reckoning up the Fruits of the Spirit, places them in this Order; *Love, Joy, Peace, Long-suffering, Gentleness, Goodness, Faith, Meekness, Temperance;* and continuing his Account, though varying his Style, he adds, *And they that are Christ's have crucified the Flesh, with the Affections and Lusts.*

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Were the Manners of any People to be described in this Language, there is no one so little acquainted with human Nature, but that he would suspect the Truth of the Relation. Where must we go, to the East or to the West, to find a People pure and peaceable, full of Mercy and good Works, without Partiality, without Hypocrisy, crucifying the Flesh, and the Affections and Lusts thereof? No History yet has presented us with such an Idea of Mankind. But, if we look into the Account which the same Apostle gives of the Works of the Flesh, we shall find too great a Correspondence between them, and the historical Accounts of all Nations: They are, *Adultery, Fornication, Uncleanness, Lasciviousness, Idolatry, Witchcraft, Hatred, Variance, Emulations, Wrath, Strife, Seditions, Heresies, Envyings, Murders, Drunkenness, Revellings, and such like.* These Works we know where to find, and are sure of not mistaking, in what Country soever we seek them. You see the Difference between the Works of Nature and Grace: And tell me, Was it a Work unworthy of God to send his Spirit to make the Difference? If you think it not yet so sufficiently made as to answer the Pretensions of the Gospel, yet you must own that here is a Work worthy of God to undertake; and that, if we have not the Spirit already to produce these Effects, it were much to be wished that we had: So that natural Reason shall be forced to give this Testimony to the Gospel, that the Help it proposes is the Thing in the World the most to be desired, the most honourable for God to give, the most advantageous for Man to receive. If you ask us what Evidence we have to shew, that we have received this Promise of the Gospel; it were well indeed if we had more Evidence than we have, and that every Man naming the Name

of Christ were a living Testimony of the Spirit of God working in him; and yet, I trust, we have enough to shew that the Promises of God are not in vain. The Spirit is given to be a Principle of Religion, and not of Force and Mechanism; and consequently it must be maintained to be consistent with the Freedom of Man's Will, without the Supposition of which it is impossible to have any Notion of Religion: And if many, who by their Profession of Christianity are entitled to the Promise of the Spirit, do shew no Signs of the Power of God working in them, they will be so many Proofs indeed, that the Grace of God is not irresistible. But no better Argument can be drawn from their Case to shew, that the Pretences to Grace are mere Fiction, than may be drawn from the unreasonable Actions of the Generality of Men to shew, that Reason itself is a Fiction, and that there is no such governing Principle in Mankind.

We have indeed the fullest Proof, that there is such a Thing as Reason and natural Understanding in Men; and therefore the Abuse of Reason creates no Suspicion against the Being of it: But the Deist sees no Proof of the Reality of Grace in any; the Effects we ascribe to it, and which are the only visible Evidences for its Reality, are no other than what Reason prescribes; and wherever they are found, he claims them as the Work of Reason, and demands of us to shew upon what Ground we ascribe them to any other Principle. If Men are meek, and charitable, and good, void of Partiality and Hypocrisy, they are but what their Reason tells them they should be; and since these Virtues flow from the Dictates of Reason, by what Right do we impute them to another Principle? The Apostle to the *Romans* has taught us the Resolution of this Difficulty: *I delight*, says he, *in the Law*

Law of God after the inward Man: But I see another Law in my Members warring against the Law of my Mind, and bringing me into Captivity to the Law of Sin, which is in my Members. O wretched Man that I am, who shall deliver me from the Body of this Death! I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. That the Dictates of Reason are just and right, St. Paul acknowledges; but right as they are, we gain little by them but the Conviction of Sin and Guilt; for there is another Principle in the Members warring against this Principle of Reason, or Law of the Mind, which brings us under the Slavery of Sin. This State afforded him so little Comfort, notwithstanding the Goodness of his Reason to distinguish rightly between Virtue and Vice, that he exclaims in the Bitterness of his Soul, O wretched Man that I am, who shall deliver me from the Body of this Death! Under these Agonies he saw no Help in Nature, no Assistance to be had from Reason; and therefore he flies to the Arms of Christ for Shelter, and owns him for his only Redeemer from this Captivity to Sin: I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. And having found this safe Retreat, he goes on in another Strain: There is therefore now no Condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the Flesh, but after the Spirit: For the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the Law of Sin and Death.

You see how the Apostle founds the Necessity of Grace: Not in this, that we want Reason to shew us the Difference between Good and Evil, and to direct us in our Duty; but in this, that the Light of Reason is too weak a Restraint upon the Inclinations to Evil, which are become natural to Man. These Inclinations overpowering Reason, bring in the Slavery of Sin and Death. We become Slaves by departing from the Law

Law of Reason; we are freed from Slavery by Grace: Grace therefore is given to restore us to the Obedience of Reason. So far is it from being an Objection to the Reality of Grace, that the Works of Grace are Works of Reason, that the very best Evidence we can have that the Grace of God is in us, is this, that we live up to the pure and sincere Dictates of Reason. We ascribe it not to Grace, that we know our Duty; but this we ascribe to it, that we are able to perform it. And upon this State of the Case it appears, that the Evidence which Christians can make to themselves and others, that the Spirit of God dwelleth in them, must arise from their Works of Love and Obedience:

This Trial, though it may prove in the End a severe one, since the Love of many is grown cold, we can by no means refuse: For how shall we refuse to stand Trial by the Rule laid down by our Saviour, *By their Fruits, says he, you shall know them; and by his Apostle St. John, This is the Love of God, that we keep his Commandments?* To the same Purpose our Lord speaks in the fifteenth of St. John, comparing himself to a Vine, and his Father to an Husbandman: *I am the Vine, ye are the Branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much Fruit; for without me ye can do nothing. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much Fruit, so shall ye be my Disciples.*

Unbelievers may have many Objections to make against the Operations of the Holy Spirit, which need not affect or disturb the Faith and Hope of a Christian. But when they object to us the Want of Evidence in the Works of Christians, they raise a Difficulty, which every Believer is bound to answer for himself, or to quit his Pretensions to the Hopes and Promises of the Gospel. The Confidence of some, that they have the Spirit of God, though they have nothing but their
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own Confidence to alledge in Proof of it, is a Conceit, unknown to the Churches of God: The Gospel is a Stranger to it, and it was taught in some other School than that of Christ.

If you would know whether the Spirit of Christ be in you of a truth, you have a plain Rule in the Text to examine yourself by. The Apostle St. James speaks of two sorts of Wisdom, the one *earthly, sensual, devilish*; the Fruits of which are, *Envyings, Strife, Confusion, and every evil Work*: the other heavenly, which is *pure and peaceable, gentle and easy to be intreated, full of Mercy and good Fruits, without Partiality, without Hypocrisy*. It is no hard Matter for a Man to know to which Class he belongs; the Characters are bold, and easily distinguished; the Difference is so great between Confusion and Peace, Strife and Gentleness, Envy and Mercy, every evil Work and every good Work, that we cannot easily mistake in applying these Marks. Search therefore your own Hearts, for thence must come the Resolution, whether the Spirit of Christ dwell in you or no. How the Spirit cometh, or how it goeth, we know not. Our Saviour, in his Discourse with Nicodemus, compares the Influence of the Spirit to the Blowing of the Wind, *Thou hearest the Sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit*. How the new Birth and Regeneration is performed, he only can tell who performs it; but the Effects of it every Man may see, they are as discernible as the Noise of the Winds, though in their Cause and Spring as secret, and altogether as far removed from human Sight.

As the Fruits of the Spirit are the only Evidence we can have of the Spirit, so the End of giving the Spirit is the producing these good Fruits. Sanctification, Regeneration, and all other Terms by which the Ope-

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ration and Work of the Spirit in Believers are denoted, signify to us that the Spirit is given to redeem us from Sin, and to render us a People acceptable to God, zealous of good Works. And surely it is no small Commendation of the Gospel, that the Things in it, which seem most mysterious, have the plainest Use, and are introduced to promote such Ends, as must appear to the most prejudiced Mind to be honourable to God, and advantageous to Mankind. We offer you, upon the Terms of the Gospel, the Gifts of the Holy Ghost: In Virtue of this Offer we call you to Holiness and Obedience. What Design or Contrivance have you to suspect? If any thing is to be gained by your being virtuous, the Advantage will be all your own. Nay, suppose that you are deceived into Goodness, yet for you at least it will be an happy Deceit; and, I think, no unhappy one for the rest of the World. Who will suffer by Men's becoming gentle and peaceable? If there were more of this Spirit in the World, it would be a much happier Place than it is: For the Strife and Confusion, and all the Miseries which we see and hear, have their Rise from that Wisdom which is earthly and sensual.

From what has been said arises this plain Conclusion: That the true Way of judging, whether the Spirit of God be in us, is to consider our own Deeds. Righteousness and Holiness are the only certain Marks of Regeneration. Other Distinctions which Men have invented are rather Marks of their spiritual Pride, and of their Separation from the Body of Christians, than of their Union with Christ the Head. Take heed therefore that you adorn the Faith with a Meekness and Quietness of Spirit, that you may have the Comfort and Consolation of knowing that you have not believed in vain.

DISCOURSE XIII.

MATTHEW V. 48.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect.

PRACTICE is the End of all Precepts and Exhortations: Laws are therefore enacted, that Subjects may obey: Exhortations are therefore added, that they may be encouraged to do their Duty. It must then be a very great Absurdity, to make any thing, in its own Nature impracticable, the Subject-matter either of Command or Advice. And does not the Text seem liable to this Objection? Is there any thing which Men have more Reason to think impossible to them, than to arrive at the Perfections of the Deity? Why then are we commanded or exhorted to be perfect, even as our Father in Heaven is perfect, since nothing but Disappointment can be the Issue of our strongest Endeavours after this Perfection, from which we stand excluded by the unalterable Laws of Nature? This Difficulty is too obvious to escape any one's Notice. Some therefore

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tell you, that the Text contains only Matter of Counsel or Advice, but not of Precept or Command, and with this Softening they think the Difficulty may be digested; as if it were more reasonable, or more becoming an inspired Teacher, to advise than to command Impossibilities: Whereas the only Difference in the Case is, that in Matters of Command we must either obey or suffer, in Matters of Counsel only we have a greater Latitude allowed us; so that with respect to ourselves it is more tolerable to be advised than to be commanded to Things impracticable: But, with respect to the Lawgiver, it is one and the same Thing, and his Reason and Equity can be no more justified in advising, than in commanding Impossibilities. Others tell you, that it is not Equality, but Quality of Perfections that is enjoined in the Text; that is, we are commanded to aim at the same Perfections with God, though not in the same Degree; that as God is just, and righteous, and merciful, so must we endeavour to be just, and righteous, and merciful, though not to the same Degree or Extent that God is. This Exposition avoids the Difficulty complained of; for there is nothing extraordinary in commanding Men to imitate the Perfections of God in a Degree suitable to their own Nature and Ability. But then this is an Exposition, not arising from the Circumstances of the Text, which lead us to a more extensive View.

In the 43d Verse our Saviour says, *Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy Neighbour, and hate thine Enemy.* In the 44th Verse he corrects the Partiality of this Law; *But I say unto you, love your Enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.* In the 45th and 46th Verses, he confirms his own Precept from the Example and Authority

Authority of God : *That ye may be the Children of your Father which is in Heaven; for he maketh his Sun to rise on the Evil and on the Good, and sendeth Rain on the Just, and on the Unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what Reward have ye? Do not even the Publicans the same?* And in the 48th Verse he concludes this Argument in the Words of the Text ; *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect.* From whence it is evident, that the Quality or Temper of Mercy and Compassion was not the Thing recommended to us by our Blessed Lord from the Example of God, for that he told them even the Publicans had in some Degree, for they loved those who loved them ; but it is the Extent of this Mercy and Compassion which was discernible in the Works of Providence, which he presses from this Example : Your Father in Heaven is bountiful to the Evil, as well as the Good ; to the Unjust, as well as the Just : Go ye therefore and do likewise, and learn from hence to love your Enemies, as well as your Friends ; to do good to those who hate you, as well as to those who love you. This certainly was recommending not only the Temper of Mercy, which is natural to the Deity, but also that extensive Exercise of it, that Perfection of Goodness, which shone forth in all his Works.

Since then we can have no Relief from Expositions of this Kind, we must consider the Text in another View, and see what Assistance we can have from the Circumstances of the Context, or the general Reason in which the Precept is founded. And these two Inquiries will take in what is necessary to be known upon this Subject. For, if we consider this Precept as Part of the Gospel Doctrine, it will be sufficient to know, how far it may be extended upon the Authority of the Gospel : Or, if we consider it as a general Maxim and

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Rule of Religion, which had a Foundation in Reason antecedent to the Promulgation of the Gospel, it will be sufficient to understand, how far the Reason of the Command goes, and how it may be applied to the several Duties of Religion and Morality.

First then, Let us examine the Text as it stands limited by the Circumstances of the Context.

It is evident from what has been already observed, that the Precept of the Text stands applied to the particular Case of Charity and Mercy. Had it been otherwise, had our Saviour intended, in every Instance of our Duty, to refer us to the Perfection of God, as the proper Rule and Measure of our Obedience, this Precept should have stood at the Close of his Sermon, which might have given it a Reference to all that had gone before, and not been confined in the middle of his Discourse to a particular Duty. It is farther to be observed, that the Instance of Duty to which this Precept is annexed, is illustrated by a particular Mention of God's dealing with Men in like Cases. We are bid to love our Enemies, and are told how merciful and compassionate God is to the Evil and Unjust; the natural Application of the Example lies in the Exhortation of the Text, that we should aim at that Perfection of Mercy and Goodness, which we may every Day see exercised by God towards us all. But, in other Instances of Duty mentioned in this Sermon, the Example of God is not proposed; and, considering the Connection between the Example and the Application, there can be no Reason to carry the Application to other Cases, in which the same Example is not proposed. Nay farther, there are some Points of Duty explained and enforced in this Sermon on the Mount, to which neither the Example nor the Exhortation can be applied. Such are the Duties arising from the Relations

lations which are peculiar to Man, and no where else to be found: As in the Case of Afflictions and Persecutions, which we ought to bear patiently, not in Consideration of the Example of the Deity, whom no Afflictions can approach, but in Consideration of his Goodness and Power, who thinks fit to inflict them on us. In the Instance of Mercy and Forgiveness, to which the Exhortation in the Text stands applied, there can be no greater or properer Motive to Obedience than the Example of our heavenly Father; it cuts off all the Pretences which Men have for Anger or Revenge. Has your Enemy abused or affronted you? What then? Are you greater than God, who bears with so much Lenity the perpetual Abuses and Affronts of wicked Men? Or are you provoked to revenge the Iniquities you behold, and to extirpate the Profane and Ungodly? Believe at least that God is not unconcerned for his own Honour; and therefore, even in this Case, you cannot be more safe or secure than by following the Example which he sets you in the daily Administrations of his Providence.

Supposing then that this Example is confined to the Exercise of Love and Mercy; yet still, can we pretend to be as good and as merciful as God is, or does our Saviour require it of us? If not, where is the Limitation to be placed? It must be placed undoubtedly where our Saviour himself has placed it. He tells you how imperfect the old Doctrine was, because it required of us only to love our Friends, and permitted us to hate our Enemies: But God, says he, loves and does good to his Enemies, as well as his Friends. This is perfect Love, not restrained by Partialities. When therefore it follows, *Be ye perfect, as your Father;* the precise Meaning is, let your Love be universal, unconfined by Partialities, and, with respect to its Objects,

Objects, as large as God's is: Not that our Love either to Enemies or Friends can be supposed in other Respects, and as to the Effects of it, to bear any Proportion to the divine Love.

But, as in this Case of extending our Love, the Example is proper, and therefore also the Exhortation to follow it; so in others it would be very injurious to the Deity to suppose, that any Example could be drawn from his Perfections. In our present State of Corruption, it is a great Part of Religion to govern our Thoughts well, and the inward Inclinations of our Hearts; but it would be as reasonable to bid us govern the World as God governs it, as to govern our Thoughts as he governs his: He is liable to none of the Imperfections, which make the Government of our Thoughts to be a necessary Duty in us: He has told us, *My Thoughts are not as your Thoughts*: And where is no Similitude in the Cases, no Example can be drawn from the one to the other. So that in this, and in many other Instances which might be given, we have a Duty incumbent on us, towards the due Performance of which we can draw no Example from the divine Perfections. Since then the Exhortation to imitate the divine Perfections cannot reach to all Parts of our Duty, I see no Reason why it should be extended to any upon the Authority of our Saviour, to which he himself has not extended it; and as the Use of it is peculiarly reserved in Holy Writ to the Case of Mercy and Forgiveness, it ought by no means to be drawn into a general Precept, to the perplexing as well the Understandings as the Consciences of the Weak. St. Paul, in his Epistle to the *Ephesians*, exhorts them to be *Followers of God, as dear Children*: But then it is with regard to this very Case; for he had said immediately before, Chap. iv. 32. *Be ye kind one to another,*

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tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you; and, with reference to this Duty, he adds, ver. 1st of the next Chapter, *Be ye therefore Followers of God, as dear Children*; to which he subjoins, *And walk in Love, as Christ also hath loved us, giving himself for us*, ver. 2. So that his Exhortation to follow God stands inclosed on both Sides with the Precepts of Love and Charity, as if he intended to secure it from being applied to any thing else. And if our Saviour meant any thing more in the Text, if he had a View to any other Duties or Commands than that of Love and Mercy only, when he placed before us the Example of our heavenly Father, St. Luke, I am sure, has done him great Injury in reporting his Doctrine. He, in the sixth Chapter of his Gospel, gives us the Sermon on the Mount; when he comes to the Topick of Love and Forgiveness, he introduces the Example of God, *who is kind to the Unthankful, and to the Evil*. He concludes also with an Exhortation referring to the Example, as St. Matthew does: But instead of the general Phrase used by St. Matthew, *Be ye perfect, as your Father is perfect*; St. Luke has it only, *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful*. The two Evangelists are giving an Account of the same Sermon, and of the same Passage; and if they are consistent, St. Matthew's, *Be ye perfect, as God is perfect*, can relate only to that particular Perfection of Mercy and Forgiveness, which our Saviour had been recommending, and is of no greater Extent than St. Luke's, *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful*. The Holy Writers often require of us that we should be perfect and blameless; that is, as St. Paul expresses it in the fourth of the Colossians, and twelfth Verse, that we *should stand perfect and complete in all the Will of God*: But it is one thing to be perfect in all the Will of God, and another to be perfect even

as he is perfect. The Will of God, however manifested to us, is the proper Rule of the Perfection we ought to aim at; but the transcendent Perfections of the Deity are to be revered and adored, but never attained to by any Creature.

It is true, that as the moral Perfections of the Deity afford us the truest Image of Holiness and Purity, so are they the best Patterns to place before our Eyes for the Conduct of our own Lives. It is praise-worthy to imitate a Perfection as far as we are able, though we can never hope to come up to the great Original: And though there is no room to exhort Men to be perfect as God is perfect, yet it is reasonable to press them to imitate their heavenly Father. For neither he who advises the Imitation, nor he who attempts it, go upon the Supposition, that it is either necessary or possible to be as perfect as he: But this they both agree in, that the nearer any one can come to the Pattern, the more perfect he will be; and therefore the Imitation of God has not for its End the attaining to the Perfections of God, but the attaining to the greatest Perfection we are capable of. In this Sense St. Peter exhorts us to be holy, because God is holy: *For as he, says the Apostle, which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of Conversation,* 1 Pet. i. 15. And St. John in his first Epistle, Chap. iii. 3. to the same Purpose: *Every Man that hath this Hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure.* The Notion we have of the Purity and Holiness of God is a very powerful Motive to us to be holy and pure, since nothing but Holiness and Purity can recommend us to the Favour and Protection of a Being, who is holy and pure. A Conformity therefore to the divine Nature in the moral Perfections of it, is the utmost Excellence and Happiness of human Souls, and that which we ought to labour to attain

with the greatest Ardor and Contention of Mind. It is a noble Subject for the Entertainment of our Thoughts; but it has had the Misfortune to owe more to the Power of Imagination than to the Light of Reason; and has had so great a Place allowed it in some enthusiastical Writers, as to be less cultivated than it deserves by soberer Inquirers. And yet this Conformity to the Divine Nature was a Lesson taught by some few wise Heathens, who found, by the Light of Reason and Nature, wherein the true Dignity and Happiness of Man consisted: For the Imitation of God is not a new Principle introduced into Religion by the Revelation of the Gospel, but has its Foundation in the Reason and Nature of Things.

And this was the second Thing I proposed to consider.

That we should endeavour to be perfect, even as God is perfect, in the strict Meaning of the Words, is no more the Direction of Reason than it is of Revelation: He knows but little of himself; and less of God, who is capable of such a Thought. But that we should aim at the Resemblance of the divine Perfections, as far as our present State will permit, is but the natural Consequence arising from the Knowledge we have of God, and the Obligation we are under to cultivate and improve our own Minds. God is a rational Being, and so are we, though at a great Distance from him. As we are thus far made in the Image and Likeness of God, so are we capable, by the Enlargement of our Faculties, of a nearer Approach to him: For the moral Perfections of all rational Minds are in Kind the same, however vastly they differ in Degree. Were it otherwise, the Perfections of the Deity could not be so much a Pattern for us to follow. Were Holiness, Righteousness, Justice and Mercy, of a different Nature con-

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sidered in God, from what they are when considered in Man, it is plain, that the Holiness or Goodness of God could be neither the Example nor the Motive of Holiness in Men : And it would be absurd to say, as the Scripture does, *Be ye holy, for I am holy* ; unless Holiness in both Cases, as applied to God, and as applied to Man, denoted a moral Perfection of the same kind, proper to both as rational Beings, though attainable by us only in that Proportion which our weak Nature will allow. Since then the Perfections which are essential to God, considered as a rational Being, are the very same which we, as rational Beings, ought to aspire to, since they are in him in the utmost Perfection also ; to say, that we ought to conform ourselves to the divine Nature, and to imitate the Excellencies of it, is no more than to say, that we ought to endeavour after those Perfections, which are natural and proper to rational Minds ; and which belong to us in Consequence of that Image and Likeness of our Maker, which was stamped upon us at our first Creation.

But though the Example of God be in itself a very strong Motive and Argument for Holiness ; yet, in the Nature of the Thing, Example is but a secondary Argument, and supposes an antecedent Obligation to the Duty, the due Performance of which we learn from the Example set before us. It is no Reason for me to endeavour to do this or that, because I see another do it ; for it may be fit for him to do, and yet very unfit for me to attempt ; and therefore Example can have no Place, till the Rule of Duty is first settled. It would be very absurd to think, that every Thing that God does, yields a proper Example for us to follow ; and therefore we are to search for a Reason, why some of his Perfections are proper Examples, and others not so ; that is, we are to search for their primary Rule of Duty,

Duty, which obliges us to endeavour after some of the Perfections discoverable in the Deity, and not the others.

In all Inquiries of this kind, the last Resort must be to the Light of our own Minds; from hence arises the Obligation we are under to moral Virtue. We are a Law to ourselves, and such a Law as no Power whatever can absolve us from the Obedience due to it, as long as we continue to enjoy the same Powers and Faculties of Reason which at present we are endowed with. From this Light of Nature we learn both the Law and the Example which we are now inquiring after, that is; we learn our own Obligation to Holiness, and we learn to know God, who is perfect Holiness. Did Reason discover to us the moral Perfections of the Deity, without shewing us, at the same time, any Obligation incumbent on us to follow after the like Perfections, the Holiness of God so discovered would be no more an Example for our Imitation than his Power is. It is therefore from the Light of our own Minds, that we discover the Difference of moral Good and Evil, and the Obligations consequent upon that Difference; it is from the same Light that we find the moral Perfections to be possessed by the Deity in their utmost Beauty: So that the same Reason and Nature, which holds forth to us the Rule of our Duty, holds forth also the perfect Example of it. Now, since no Example is a good one, which does not teach the same Doctrine with the Rule of Duty, and the Rule of Duty in this Case being the Light of our own Minds; it must necessarily follow, that to obey the Dictates of Reason, and to imitate the Example of God, is in the End one and the same Thing.

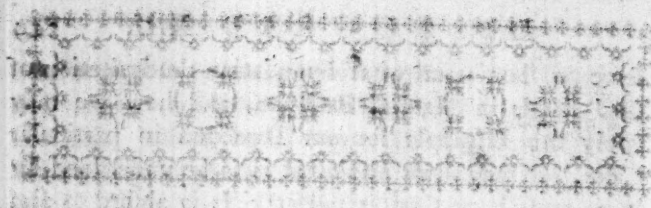
That it must be so, will appear by considering, that we can no other Way trace the Perfections of the Deity,

But from those natural Notions of Perfection which we find in our own Minds: We should not ascribe to God Holiness, Justice, and Mercy, did not the Light of Reason discover to us the Excellencies of these Attributes. Now the Holiness, Justice, and Mercy, which the Light of Reason discovers, are the moral Virtues which we are obliged to follow after; they are also the Perfections which we ascribe to the Deity: So that whether we follow the Dictates of Reason in endeavouring after these Virtues, or whether we look up to the Deity, and copy from the Perfection of his Nature; it is evident, that in both Cases we follow the same Virtues, though placed before us in a different View. For, since our Notion of the Perfections of the Deity must be formed from such natural Notions of moral Perfection, as Reason and the Light of Nature can supply; whether we consider these Perfections as inherent in the Deity, and endeavour to copy after the first and great Original, or whether we take our natural Notions of moral Virtue, as Principles and Rules of Religion, which ought to influence and direct our Lives, the Issue will be the same with respect to our Practice. It is easier for Men, when once they have a Notion of a perfect righteous Being, to consider, in particular Cases, what such a Being would do or approve, than to run up in an abstracted Way of reasoning to first Principles and Maxims for Direction. But, whichever Way you take, the Inquiry is the same, namely, what is fit and reasonable to be done in this or that Case: And let the Method of Inquiry be what it will, the Judgment must be such as our present Share of Reason will enable us to make. And therefore the Imitation of God is a Principle of Religion arising from, and depending on, the right Use and Exercise of Reason, as much as any other whatever. And this may
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serve to shew upon what Foundation the Imitation of God stands in Natural Religion, and how we may apply this Principle for our Direction in particular Cases. It may shew also what is to be understood by being perfect, as God is perfect: It is absurd to aim at the Measure of his Perfection; but we are then, to all the Purposes of Life and Religion, perfect as He is perfect, when we do nothing but what He will approve: For to stand approved in the Eye of an All-perfect and Holy Being, is the true Perfection of every Creature. This is the Christian Excellency, as described by St. Paul in the Words once already quoted, and with which I shall conclude this Discourse, *That we may stand perfect and complete in all the Will of God.*



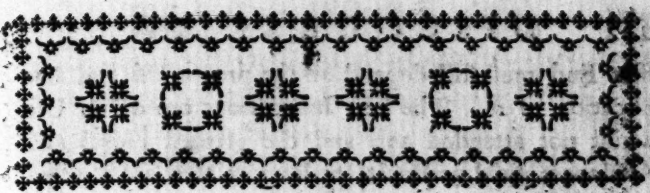


DISCOURSE XIV.

John 11. 49.
This is the Commission, that Light came into the
World, and Man's Duty, to follow that Light,
because their Duty requires it.

MAN being a reasonable Creature, and en-
dowed with Faculties to judge and chuse for
himself in all Cases, is a contrary to Na-
ture to suppose, that there should be any
thing absolutely or necessarily good to him; since the
Advantage to be drawn from any thing whatever, de-
pends on the right Use and Application of that Thing
to its proper Ends and Purposes. Wholesome Food is
good for the sound, but it taken in undue Measure it
grows into a Distaste. Physick is proper for the sick;
but if the Patient will not labour to proper Regula-
tions, that which might have been his Cure will cer-
tainly be his Destruction.

As it is with respect to the Body, so is it likewise
with respect to the Mind; there is no such thing as an
absolute or necessary Cure for the Fancies and Intri-
cacies of it, but the properest Method for attaining
that



DISCOURSE XIV.



JOHN iii. 19.

This is the Condemnation, that Light is come into the World, and Men loved Darkneſs rather than Light, becauſe their Deeds were evil.

AN being a reaſonable Creature, and endued with Faculties to judge and chuſe for himſelf in all Caſes, it is contrary to Nature to ſuppoſe, that there ſhould be any thing abſolutely or neceſſarily good to him; ſince the Advantage to be drawn from any thing whatever, depends on the right Uſe and Application of that Thing to its proper Ends and Purpoſes. Wholeſome Food is good for the Sound, but if taken in undue Meaſure it grows into a Diſeaſe. Phyſick is proper for the Sick; but if the Patient will not ſubmit to proper Regulations, that which might have been his Cure will certainly be his Deſtruction.

As it is with reſpect to the Body, ſo is it likewiſe with reſpect to the Mind; there is no ſuch thing as an abſolute or neceſſary Cure for the Frailties and Infirmities of it, but the propereſt Method for attaining

that End must still depend on the proper Use and Application of it. The best Instructions are of no Use whilst not attended to; and the greatest Helps and Assistances yield no Profit, as long as they are rejected and despised.

Were the Case otherwise, that is, were there any System of Religion pretending, in virtue of some uncontrollable Power, to make Men righteous, such a System might be valued as a good Piece of spiritual Mechanism; but it could never be considered as a Rule of Virtue and Morality, since, the Operation of the Will being excluded, the Morality of all human Actions would be excluded with it.

And hence it follows, that the utmost that can be done for us in Religion, is so to instruct us, that we may not err for want of Knowledge of our Duty, and so to aid and assist us, that it may be in our Power, whenever it is in our Will, to obey. Any thing beyond this is inconsistent with Reason and Freedom, and therefore can have no Part in a Religion designed for the Government of rational free Agents. And this being the Case, that must in the Comparison be judged to be the best Religion, which does most fully enlighten our Understanding, and which does in the most perfect Manner restore us to our Liberty and Freedom, by removing the Impediments which arise from the Weakness and Corruption of our Nature. All who live under the Influence of such a Religion as this, as they have a certain Way to Happiness marked out for them, if they chuse to walk in it, so are they certainly doomed to Condemnation upon their Disobedience. For there are but two Sorts of Men who can hope to escape Punishment, the Righteous, who have no Reason to fear Judgment, and the Sinners, who offending through Ignorance or Weakness, have some Plea to make for Mercy

Mercy and Forgiveness : But the Sinners, who knew their Duty, and were so assisted as to have been able, had they been but willing, to perform it, have nothing to expect but Condemnation. What the Apostle therefore in the Text has declared to us, is no more than a natural Consequence drawn from the Excellency of the Gospel, and the Perverseness of Men, considered together : *This is the Condemnation, that Light is come into the World, and Men loved Darknes rather than Light, because their Deeds were evil.* Were the Gospel less perfect than it is, or less known to the World, Sinners would have more to plead in their own Behalf : But since they want no Light to direct them, no Assistance to support them in doing their Duty, they are left without Excuse for their Disobedience. The Gospel, which was given to them for Life and Salvation, will be their Judgment and Condemnation ; and the Fault is all their own : They have as little Reason to complain of the Gospel Religion upon this Account, as the dying Patient has of the Physician, whose wholesome Medicines he wantonly abused to his own Destruction. Were the Gospel merely a Matter of Advice, which Men might follow, or let alone, as they found most convenient for their own Purposes, they would then have less to answer for, if they neglected it. But the Gospel is a Law proceeding from the best and highest Authority, given by God to his Creatures ; and we are bound at our Peril to take notice of it : If we will not walk in the Light of God's Law, when it shines so brightly before our Eyes, we shall be condemned for choosing Darknes rather than Light. This is the Meaning of the Text, which I shall therefore, in the first place, endeavour to confirm from other Passages of Holy Writ ; and shall then shew you, that there can be no Reason assigned, why Men make this perverse Choice

of continuing in Darkness rather than Light, but this only, *because their Deeds are evil.*

When our Blessed Lord commissioned his Apostles to preach the Gospel throughout the World, he declared at the same time, that *he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.* Which Declaration having manifestly a Reference to the Precept foregoing, of preaching the Gospel in all the World, it is evident that the Believers and Unbelievers, here spoken of, are such only as have had the Gospel preached to them. And therefore this Text admits of no Occasion to inquire into the Circumstances of such as have never had the Gospel published to them; much less does it determine peremptorily any thing concerning them: But as to those to whom the Grace of God has been tendered by the preaching of the Ministers of Christ, their Case is fully stated and determined by our Blessed Lord; *He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.*

To the same Purpose speaketh St. Paul in his Sermon to the Men at Athens, in which he thus declares his Sense with regard to the Times before the Gospel, and the Times since; *And the Times of this Ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all Men every-where to repent.* Where the Command to repent being opposed to God's winking at the Times of Ignorance, plainly shews, that from the going forth of the Command to repent, God will no longer wink at the Ignorance of the World; and therefore it is at every Man's Peril, if he refuses to hearken to the heavenly Call.

In like manner does the same Apostle deliver himself in his Epistle to the Romans, Chap. i. The Gospel, he tells us, *is the Power of God unto Salvation to every one that believeth.* He tells us also, *That the Wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all Ungodliness and Unrighteousness*

righteousness of Men. So that the Revelation, as it affords all Help and Assistance to such as are willing to do the Works of Righteousness, and embrace the Offers of Peace, so does it render all Ungodliness inexcusable, leaving Men no Pretence, either from Ignorance or Weakness, to cover their Iniquity.

Out of the many Texts of Scripture which speak to the same Purpose, I shall select but one Testimony more, and shall go back for that to the early Dawnings of the Gospel. When our Lord sent forth his twelve Apostles to preach to the Jews only, he thus instructs them: *When ye come into an House, salute it. And if the House be worthy, let your Peace come upon it: But if it be not worthy, let your Peace return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your Words, when ye depart out of the House or City, shake off the Dust of your Feet. Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the Land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment, than for that City.* In which Words our Blessed Lord so plainly speaks his Mind, with respect to those who neglect and despise the Gospel, that they will hardly admit of any farther Explication.

Upon the whole it appears, that it is not left to every Man's Choice, whether he will be subject to the Gospel or no; for subject he shall be, so as to be entitled to the Rewards of it for his Obedience, or to the Punishments of it for his Disobedience. And this is not a Circumstance particular to the Gospel only, but common to all Laws founded on sufficient Authority. No Man is at Liberty to chuse whether he will be governed by the Laws of the Realm; and it would be to little Purpose to plead to an Indictment, that you never intended to be governed by the Law, but chuse to act by other Rules; and therefore desire that the Law may have no Place in the Judgment, but that you may be tried by

those Rules by which you chuse to live. The Authority of the Lawgiver cuts off such Pleas; and since you owed Submission to such Authority, your refusing to pay it will be justly taken as the Aggravation, not as the Excuse of your Crime. If this be the Case in human Laws, it is much more so in those of divine Original: For the greater the Authority of the Lawgiver is, the more absolute must our Obedience and Submission be. And if this be just Reasoning, it may appear perhaps, that the Pretence for Deism, which at present seems to be the most plausible, will in the End be its greatest Aggravation. For though, when Men discard the Gospel out of a Zeal to preserve the moral Law of Reason and Nature, they may seem to act with great Regard to Virtue and Holiness, yet do they manifestly reject the Authority of God, and deliberately refuse that Obedience, which Reason teaches to be due to the great Lawgiver of the World. But these Pretences, considered in themselves, will be found to have little Weight; since the Gospel being the truest Light to direct us, Men can have no Reason to forsake it, but this only which is assigned in the Text, *because their Deeds are evil.*

The avowed Design of our Blessed Saviour's coming into the World was to destroy the Works of the Devil, and to restore Religion, both as it respects God and Man, to its native Purity and Simplicity. The first great Lesson he taught the World was Repentance from dead Works, in order to qualify them to become Members of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Laws of his Gospel are declaratory of the original Law of Reason and Nature, and contain the fairest Copy of it, purged from all the Corruptions that darkened and obscured its Beauty. All the Mysteries and secret Purposes of God, which are revealed to us, are intended only to
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give us the Comfort and Assurance of God's Mercy and Pardon of our past Transgressions, and to raise us to a lively Hope of Life and Immortality through Faith and Obedience. All the Institutions of the Gospel, such as Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the like, are set before us, as the proper Means to enable us to make our Calling and Election sure, by continuing stedfast in the Works of Holiness. And what is it that can tempt a Man to reject a Religion so excellently well adapted to serve all the good Ends of living in this World, and to support the Hopes of living happily in that which is to come? Is it your Concern to reform Mankind, and to restrain those evil Inclinations, which make this World a Scene of Misery? Is it for this Purpose that you search the inward Sentiments of Nature, and from thence set forth the Hopes and Fears of a future Judgment to be a Bridle upon the unruly Passions of Men? Search the Gospel, and you will find all the Hopes and Fears of Nature displayed in their fullest Light, and supported by the express Revelation of God, who raised his own Son from the Dead, to give us the Assurance of a Resurrection either to Life or Death eternal, according to the Things done in the Body. You cannot therefore pretend to forsake the Gospel, in order to secure an Obedience to the moral Law by better Hopes, or stronger Fears; since the Gospel has taken in all the Hopes and Fears of Nature, and confirmed them by the irreversible Decree of God, *who hath appointed a Day in which he will judge the World by the Man Christ Jesus.*

Is it for Instruction that you recur to the Light of Nature? Would you thence learn the true Notions of Virtue and Justice, and see the Image of Holiness in its native Purity, stripped of the false Ornaments and Disguises of Superstition and Ignorance? Would you know what is the pure and acceptable Service to be
paid

paid to the Great Creator, or what are the just Bounds and Limits of the relative Duties between Man and Man? Look into the Gospel, and there you will find all the moral Duties fairly transcribed, and deduced from the two great Principles of Nature, the Love of God, and the Love of your Neighbour. There you may be instructed how to worship God in Spirit and Truth; and how to love your Brother without Dissimulation. There is no Precept of Virtue laid down in the Gospel, which Nature can reject; there is none which Nature teaches, that the Gospel has not explained and enforced. You cannot therefore forsake the Gospel, in hopes of finding a purer Religion elsewhere.

Many have complained that the Terrors of the Lord, set forth in the Gospel of Christ, are too rigid and severe, and hardly reconcileable with the Benignity of the Divine Nature; and have therefore sought to screen themselves under a milder Sentence, denounced, as they think, by the Voice of Reason and Nature. But did you ever hear that any one rejected the Gospel, that he might secure the Practice of Virtue upon a Foundation of better Hopes and Fears, that should with a more powerful Influence subdue the Minds of Men to the Obedience of Holiness? Many have lamented the Strictness of the Gospel Morality, the Laws of which require so great Perfection; that Man must hardly hope to attain to it; and have therefore recurred to the Law of Nature, not as a more perfect, but as a more equitable Rule of Justice; hoping to find, under the Protection of Nature, that Liberty and Allowance to their Infirmities, which the Gospel has precluded. But do you know the Man that ever despised the Gospel for the Immorality of its Precepts, or lest it that he might be more chaste, more temperate, more charitable, than the Laws of Christ required he should be?

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If not, let any one judge what Purposes a Man serves, when he endeavours, on one Side, to bring down the Precepts of Morality from the Strictness of the Gospel, and to give greater Liberty and Freedom to the Inclinations of the World; and, on the other Side, to weaken the Restraints laid on the Passions by the Terrors of the Christian Law, by discarding the Fears of perpetual Punishment. Is the Cause of Religion to be thus supported? Will the World be better, when less Holiness is required of them, and when even what is required becomes less necessary to be performed, by removing the Danger of transgressing? Is it for the sake of Virtue that Men plead the Cause of Libertinism, and endeavour to make void those Laws of Christ, which are most uneasy to Flesh and Blood? Is it to make Men better than they are, that you tell them the Danger of sinning is less than they apprehend, much less than the Rigor of the Gospel declares it to be? And yet these are the Views upon which those act, who retreat from the Gospel with the greatest Shew of Reason and Moderation: These are the Pretences of such as would not be thought to throw off all Regard to Religion, but only to seek a better, I doubt they mean an easier Form. And what is it that creates the Aversion to the Light which is held forth to them, and makes them chuse to retire, if not to the total Darkness of heathenish Ignorance, yet to the Shades of Natural Religion, if not this which the Text has assigned, *because their Deeds are evil*? You may think perhaps that I have forgot one great Objection which such Men have against the Gospel, and which may be entertained without supposing their Deeds to be evil; namely, that they cannot be reconciled to the Mysteries of the Gospel, or to those Institutions of it, which are upon no Foot of Reason any Part of true Religion. In Answer

to which I can only say at present, that those who make the Objection are either not in earnest, or else they are unacquainted with the Power of the Gospel. It is true, the Gospel has taught us Things, which by Nature we could not know; but they are all designed to confirm and strengthen our Hope in God, and to give us the fullest Assurance of his Mercy. It is true also, that there are in the Gospel some Institutions, which in their own Nature are no constituent Parts of Religion; but then they are such only as are necessary to enable us to do our Duty by conveying new Supplies of spiritual Strength to us, for want of which we were unable, in the State of Nature, to extricate ourselves from the Bonds of Iniquity. These are the Additions which the Gospel has made to Religion. Our Blessed Saviour saw that the Hopes of Nature were obscured, and therefore he did, by wonderful Revelations, bring Life and Immortality to Light again: He saw that her Powers were decayed, so that she could not resist Evil, and therefore he supplied the Defect by the Assistance of his Holy Spirit. If you are not willing to reap the Benefit, at least forgive his Kindness; and do not think the worse of him, or his Religion, because of the great Provision he has made in it for your Security. But I hasten to a Conclusion, and shall but briefly apply what has been said on this Subject.

What I would chiefly suggest to your Consideration is this: That the Gospel of Jesus Christ being recommended to you, as founded in the express Revelation of God, carries with it such an Authority, as cannot with Safety to yourselves be despised or neglected. It is not an indifferent Matter whether you receive it or no; for if the Gospel be truly what it is said to be, whether you will receive it, or whether you will reject it, you shall most certainly be judged by the Tenor of it.

I do

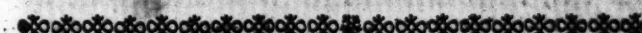
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I do not propose this Consideration as necessarily determining your Choice to the Gospel, since the Pre-
 tences of the Gospel to Divine Authority still lie under
 your Examination: But thus far the Consideration goes,
 to shew you how necessary it is to deal in this Matter
 with all Sincerity and Truth, and to try the Cause im-
 partially; since, if the Gospel be the Word of God, it
 is Death to forsake it. It is Want of Reflection that
 makes Men think Religion is a Thing so perfectly in
 their own Power, that they may chuse where and how
 they please, without being accountable for the Choice
 they make, provided only they live up to the Terms of
 it. For, in truth, Religion, properly and strictly so
 called, admits of no Choice: It does not lie before you
 to consider whether you shall love God or no, or whe-
 ther you shall love your Neighbour or no: You have no
 Choice whether you will be sober, temperate and chaste,
 or otherwise; for in these essential Parts of Religion you
 must either obey, or perish. But the Weakness and
 Corruption of Man making it necessary for God to in-
 terpose by a new Declaration of his Will, the only Dis-
 pute is of the Truth and Authority of this new Decla-
 ration. If it indeed comes from God, it cannot be safe
 to reject it: And whether it does or no, it is absurd to
 reject it without weighing its Merit. This therefore
 is, of all others, the most weighty and serious Matter,
 and requires the Exercise of your most composed
 Thoughts. For, if you wantonly or perversely refuse
 the Gift of God, this will be your Condemnation. *That*
Light is come into the World, and you loved Darkness
rather than Light.

DISCOURSE



DISCOURSE XV.



JOHN V. 44.

How can ye believe, which receive Honour one of another, and seek not the Honour that cometh from God only?

THE chief Exercise of Reason consists in disposing and regulating our Actions, so as to render them subservient to the End or Happiness which we propose to obtain. And though perhaps, with respect to the great Numbers of Men in the World, but few in Comparison chuse well for themselves, and fewer still pursue wisely and steadily the Good they chuse; yet all Men have something which is the Object of their Desires, and are endeavouring to attain their Wish by some Means or other. When we chuse ill for ourselves, the more Wit and Dexterity we have to compass our Designs, the nearer we are to Ruin, the more inevitable is our Destruction. Our best Actions, when directed to ill Purposes, become criminal, and leave nothing behind them, but the foul Stain of Hypocrisy upon our Consciences.

This

This general Truth might easily be illustrated by many particular Instances from common Life. There is nothing more commendable than a Spirit of Beneficence, and an Inclination to do good to our Fellow-Creatures: But when the Air of Beneficence is assumed merely to carry on private Views, when an Inclination to do good is professed only to promote our own Designs, and to make our Way the easier to Wealth or Honour, what is it but Fraud and Deceit?

If civil Virtue thus loses its Name and Nature by being misapplied, Religion does so much more. The Man who aims at Reputation and Interest under the Disguise of Religion, affronts God, and abuses the World, and lays up for himself certain Ruin, the just Reward of those who have *the Form of Godliness, denying the Power thereof.*

But there are Degrees in this Vice, as in most other, and Men oftentimes act under the Influence of it, without being conscious to themselves of so much Baseness, as deserves to be branded with the Name of Hypocrisy. Pride, Vanity, and Self-love, naturally give a Tincture of Hypocrisy to Men's Behaviour; they lead them to conceal whatever the World dislikes, and to make a Shew of whatever the World honours and admires. In the common Affairs of Life, where Virtue and Morality are not directly concerned, it may be very right perhaps to comply with the World: But when our Vanity, and Love of Praise and Reputation, come to influence us in Matters of Religion, they will ever give a wrong Turn to our Minds, and disable us from doing Justice to our own Reason in judging between Truth and Falshood.

This was the Case of those to whom our Saviour in the Text applies himself: He had *done among them such Works as never Man did*; to these he appeals as an Evidence

dence that he came from the Father: *The Works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same Works that I do, bear Witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.* He appeals likewise to the antient Scriptures, those Oracles of God, committed to the Jews: *Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal Life, and they are they which testify of me.* If ye suspect that I have any Views or Designs of my own, and that I speak in the Name of God without his Commission, look to the Works which I do; the Blind receive their Sight, the Dumb their Speech, the Sick and Lame are made sound, the Dead are restored to Life. His Servant I am, whose Works these are; and do ye yourselves judge from what Hand these mighty Things do proceed. If you think that I come to pervert the Law and the Prophets, let the Law and the Prophets judge between us: I claim no more Authority than they give me: Search therefore the Scriptures and see. A fairer Issue could not be proposed; so fair it was, that it had its full Effect upon many of the first Rank among the Jews. *St. John* tells us, that *among the chief Rulers many believed on him;* but they made a Secret of their Conviction, and kept it to themselves, for fear of being put out of the Synagogue; *For they loved the Praise of Men more than the Praise of God.* Which last Words are parallel to those of the Text, and express the same Sense. A Concern to be well with the People made some incapable of Conviction, and made others, notwithstanding the Conviction they were under, dissemble their real Sentiments, and reject the Authority to which in their own Minds they could not but assent.

If we consider the Nature of Religion, it will appear to us why this is, and must be the Case. Religion arises from the Relation we bear to God, and him only it does respect; and therefore when it is made to regard
other

other Objects, it necessarily becomes either Idolatry or Hypocrisy. He who serves any other than the God who made him, is an Idolater: He who serves God with a Design to please Men rather than God, is an Hypocrite. And since the End we propose to ourselves will always influence us in the Choice of the Means, whoever proposes to please the World by his Religion, will certainly chuse such a Religion as the World approves. Such an Inquirer can have no Regard for Truth, for he takes his Direction from the Opinion of the World: He concerns not himself to know, whether Jesus Christ be a Prophet approved of God; he considers only whether he is approved by the People. It is an old and a very common Observation, that the Zeal and Piety of Christians fell into Decay, when the Empire became Christian. I am willing to think that the Observation is not quite just, and to hope that those who were before pious Believers, continued so after this great Change, and that the Church has, in all Ages since, had many faithful Members. But true it is, that when the Powers of the Empire were converted to Christ, true Believers had a calmer Passage through the World, and left not behind them such shining Examples of their Zeal, as the Times of Persecution always afforded. But the great and visible Alteration was, that when the Powers of the World came into the Church, they were followed by all such as *found the Praise of Men more than the Praise of God*. Whoever professed himself a Christian in the Times of Trial and Persecution, gave to others great Evidence of his being a sincere Believer, and had great Ground of Confidence in himself, that his Heart was right with God: But since the Days of Prosperity, Profession is become a less certain Sign of true Faith; and Men, not being called to the Proof by others, nor very readily

dily calling themselves to a strict Account, have less Reason for Confidence and Assurance in themselves. The Time therefore may be profitably employed in finding some Rules by which Men may examine themselves, and judge, whether they receive Honour one of another, or do seek the Honour which cometh from God only. In order to this, I shall inquire,

First, In what Sense *the receiving Honour from Men* is condemned in the Text.

Secondly, What is meant by *seeking the Honour which cometh from God only*.

Thirdly, What are the Marks by which Men may try themselves upon these Articles.

First, I shall inquire in what Sense *the receiving Honour from Men* is condemned in the Text.

The Apostle St. Paul has given it for a Rule, that we ought to *render Honour to whom Honour is due*: And, as some Degree of Honour and Respect is due to all Men, St. Peter has given the Precept in general Terms, *Honour all Men*. Since then all Men are obliged to pay this Due, most certain it is, that all to whom *Honour is due* may very innocently receive it; nay farther, they may very justly expect and require it. A Father from his Son, a Master from his Servant or Scholar, a King from his Subjects, all who are in Authority from those under them, have a Right to demand the Respect and Honour that is due to their respective Stations and Characters. Besides, Men who stand in none of these Relations to us, have often a just Title to Respect and Honour from us upon Account of their present Qualifications; as Learning, Virtue, and Wisdom ought to be respected where-ever they are found. Since then all Honour that is due must be paid, and may be received, it is evident that the Honour mentioned in the Text,

is such as is due to no Man, and which for that Reason ought never to be paid, nor received.

It is very evident, that in the Text, and in the parallel Place of St. *John* already quoted, there is an Opposition between the Praise of Men, and the Praise of God; and that the *Jews* are condemned, as preferring the Praise and Good-will of Men to the Praise and Good-will of God. Now certain it is, that no Honour can be due to Man, that is inconsistent with the Honour which we owe to God; and we cannot be innocent, whilst we sacrifice the Good-will of God to the Vanity of being well spoken of in the World. When Men act contrary to the Truth, and their known Duty, in Compliance with the World, it is plain they are more concerned for their Interest with the World, than for their Interest with God; and this is, in the Language of our Saviour, *to receive Honour one from another, and to neglect the Honour which cometh from God only.* We have an Instance of this Conduct in the twenty-fourth of the *Acts*; As Paul reasoned of Righteousness, Temperance, and Judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, *Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient Season, I will call for thee.* You see the natural Working of Conscience, and the Power of Conviction: A sober, serious Discourse upon the great fundamental Points of Religion threw the Governor into a Fit of trembling, and made him unable to bear the Presence of his Prisoner. Had this Light been cherished and encouraged, what noble Fruits might it have produced? But the Love of the World prevailed: The Governor often communed with St. *Paul*, but it was in hopes of getting Money of him for his Release. When this Hope failed, he permitted the Preacher of Righteousness, Temperance, and Judgment to come, to continue in Prison

two Years; and, when he left the Government, *he left Paul bound, being willing, as the Text expresses it, to shew the Jews a Pleasure.* You see what Place the Honour of God had in this Man's Affections: He would have sold both God and the People for Money; but, when no Money was to be had, he chose rather to please the People than God; and therefore sacrificed his innocent Prisoner, whom in Justice he ought to have set free, to the Prejudices and Resentments of the Jewish Nation. Many denied Christ, for the same Reason that Felix left St. Paul bound, *that they might shew the People a Pleasure,* and thereby become acceptable to them. Truth and Justice must always suffer, as long as Men determine their Choice by Considerations of their temporal Interest. These Considerations are so apt to overbear the Judgment, that our Saviour speaks of them in the Text, as if they put Men under a moral Impossibility of acknowledging the Truth: *How can ye believe, who receive Honour one of another, and seek not the Honour that cometh from God only?*

Secondly, We are to inquire what is meant by *seeking the Honour which cometh from God only.*

Them that honour me, I will honour, saith the Lord; and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed. The only Way therefore to seek Honour from God, is by paying to God the Honour that is due to him. A sincere Regard to Truth and Justice is the truest Honour, indeed the only Honour we can pay to God. All external Signs of Regard to God, though expressed in the very Method prescribed by himself, become empty Shews, unless they proceed from an honest Heart. Under the Law, Circumcision was the Seal of the Covenant; and under the Gospel, Baptism succeeds in its place. They were both ordained by God; yet of the first St. Paul has said, *He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly;*

outwardly; neither is that Circumcision, which is outward in the Flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and Circumcision is that of the Heart, in the Spirit, and not in the Letter, whose Praise is not of Men, but of God. And of the second St. Peter has said, Baptism doth now save us; not the putting away the Filth of the Flesh, but the Answer of a good Conscience towards God. But this Matter is directly considered and settled by our Blessed Lord in his Sermon on the Mount. In treating on the great Duties of Religion, Almsgiving, Prayer, and Fasting, he expounds to us what it is to seek the Praise of Men, and what to seek the Praise of God, and sets before us the Consequences on both Sides. Take heed, says he, that ye do not your Alms before Men, to be seen of them; other-wise ye have no Reward of your Father which is in Heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine Alms, do not sound a Trumpet before thee, as the Hypocrites do, in the Synagogues, and in the Streets, that they may have Glory of Men; Verily I say unto you, They have their Reward. But when thou doest Alms, let not thy left Hand know what thy right Hand doeth, that thine Alms may be in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret, himself shall reward thee openly. The like Injunctions he gives us with respect to Prayer and Fasting; and shews us in every Instance, that to have Regard to Men, and the good Opinion of the World, in the performing of religious Duties, will entitle us to no higher a Reward than the Praise of Men. God will not hold himself obliged, nor can he in Justice be thought obliged, to reward those Works, which are offered up as an Incense to the World, without Regard or Respect to himself. If we seek the Praise of God, we must consider only what will please him, and put the World quite out of the question.

As it is in practical Duties, so is it in Faith likewise: He who professes to believe in Christ, merely because the World about him is in the same Profession, may obtain perhaps the Ease, the Honours, or the Riches which he aims at; and let him make the most of them, he has his Reward; for his temporal Faith will procure him no Praise or Honour from God. If you chuse a Religion with an Intention to save your Soul, you must chuse that which will render you most acceptable to God, however it may expose you to the Frowns of the World. Thus it is you must seek the Honour which cometh from God only.

How differently Men will act in Matters of Religion, when they seek the Praise of Men, and when they seek the Praise of God, may easily be collected from the Knowledge we have of God and the World, and the Measures that are necessary to please them; but I chuse to place it before you in some Instances recorded in Scripture. We read in the seventh of St. John, that many of the People believed on Jesus, and said, *When Christ cometh, shall he do more Miracles than these, which this Man hath done?* The Pharisees were alarmed at this Defection of the People; and to prevent the Growth of the Evil, they with the Chief Priests send Officers to seize our Lord: But the Officers, instead of bringing their Prisoner, return full of Admiration of him and his Doctrine, and tell their Masters, *That never Man spake like this Man.* The Pharisees found their Officers were become Believers, and they reproved them, saying, *Are ye also deceived?* But the only Argument they gave them was this, *Have any of the Rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him? But this People, who knoweth not the Law, are cursed.* What Conviction this Argument produced we know not: Silence it produced at least, for we hear of no Reply that the Officers made. In the

twelfth of St. *John* we read, that among the chief Rulers many believed on Christ, but they did not confess him; and here the Reason is given, they were afraid *lest they should be put out of the Synagogue.*

On the other Side, when the Apostles *Peter* and *John* were in Custody, and under Examination of the chief Rulers, and were commanded to teach no more in the Name of Jesus, they answered boldly, *Whether it be right in the Sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.* This Difference of Behaviour is plainly accounted for in the Text. *Peter* and *John* considered what was right in the Sight of God; the believing Rulers thought on their Interest in the Synagogue, and considered what was right in the Sight of Men: One sought the Praise of God, the other the Praise of Men. How different were their Principles and their Actions; how different also their Rewards! The Dissimulation of the *Jews* preserved to them a Place in the Synagogue; the generous Confession of the Apostles will give them a Place that shall abide for ever in Glory and Immortality. I proceed now to consider,

Thirdly, How we may examine ourselves upon this Subject, and know whether we receive Honour from Men, or seek the Honour that comes from God only.

All Times do not afford the same Trials of Faith and Sincerity, yet there is no Time but has some. If Persecution ceases, Prosperity has its Temptations; and it is perhaps as hard to deny ourselves the Honours and Glories of the World, as it is to submit to the Afflictions of it. St. *Paul* tells us, that *there must be Heresies among us, that they which are approved may be made manifest.* When the Heathens could no longer exercise their Cruelty against Christians, the external Peace of the Church was followed by internal Divisions and Contentions. The great *Arian* Controversy arose much about the

time

time that the Empire became Christian, and it yielded as severe Trials to Christians, as they had ever before experienced: The Powers of the Empire were sometimes on one Side, and sometimes on the other Side of the Controversy. What Influence it had on the Faith of the World, a Man of very moderate Experience in the World may easily collect. I will not carry this Observation into particular Instances, or bring it any nearer to our own Times, than by reminding you, that every Age has afforded this Trial to Christians; and there always is, and will be, Reason for Men, who would guard the Sincerity of their Hearts, to inquire how far they lean to the World, and court its Favours, by the Opinions which they embrace and profess under the Appearance of Religion. Whether your Opinion be true or false, yet if you maintain it in Compliment to the World, you know your Reward, the World must pay you: Your Father, who seeth in secret, has no Reward for such Believers. What the Portion of those must be, who are resolved, at all adventures, to be well with the World, and to give no Offence either to the Great or to the Wicked by their Virtue or Religion, our Saviour has plainly told us, *We unto you, when all Men shall speak well of you.*

But farther: Times of Ease and Prosperity, though attended with no other Evil, yet naturally abound in Vice, and a Neglect of the Things pertaining to Salvation: And it is counted a very wise Thing to sit still, and give way to the Torrent, and not to create ourselves and others Trouble by opposing a general Corruption: And perhaps it may be wise. But, I beseech you, is it Wisdom towards God, or Wisdom towards the World? Is it seeking that Honour which comes from above, or the Honour which comes from Men? Can you imagine that the Man, who has not Courage

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enough to venture a little of his Ease and worldly Tranquillity by expressing his Resentment at the Corruptions that surround him, would have Resolution enough to expose his Life in a Day of Trial for the sake of the Religion which he professes?

Let us examine ourselves on this Head: If we think it an happy Choice to sacrifice the Honour of God, and of Religion, to a corrupt Generation, and to screen ourselves from the Indignation of the World by a professed Indifference, is it not directly preferring the Good-will of Men to the Good-will of God? And can we complain, if we are left to seek our Recompence from the World, whose Servants we are?

In a Word: Whenever Men act in Opposition to the Truth, or dissemble the Truth in Compliance with the World; when they wink at Iniquity, and make a Way for it to escape with Impunity; when they give Credit to Vice and Irreligion by a professed Indifference, and help to establish Iniquity by affecting to seem easy and contented under the Growth of it: In all these Cases, the Words of the Text belong to them; *They receive Honour one of another, and seek not the Honour which cometh from God only.*

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE XVI.

MARK viii. 38.

Whoſoever therefore ſhall be aſhamed of me, and of my Words, in this adulterous and ſinful Generation, of him alſo ſhall the Son of Man be aſhamed; when he cometh in the Glory of his Father, with the holy Angels.

The thirty-fourth Verſe of this Chapter
A our Lord, having called the People and
his Diſciples to him, declares openly to
them upon what Terms the Profeſſion of
the Goſpel was to be undertaken. He allures them
not by the Hopes of temporal Proſperity, nor promiſes
any Countenance or Aſſiſtance from the Great and
Powerful; but foretels them of the Evils and Calami-
ties that ſhould attend his Followers, and of the Suffer-
ings prepared for them in this Life; againſt which the
Providence of God ſtands not engaged for their Protec-
tion, ſince his Will is, that all the Faithful ſhould,
after the Example of the Author and Captain of their

Salvation, be made perfect through Suffering. *Who-
soever, says our Lord, will come after me, let him deny
himself, and take up his Cross, and follow me.* How
strong the Expression of *denying himself* is, and how
much it includes, we learn from the next Verse, where
our Saviour himself extends it even to the parting with
our Lives for his, and the Gospel's sake: *Whoever will
save his Life, shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his
Life for my sake and the Gospel's, the same shall save it.*

You see, by comparing these Passages together, that
the Text immediately relates to the Times of Persecu-
tion, and expresses the Duty of a Christian to resist even
unto Blood in Maintenance of his holy Religion, when-
ever the Providence of God calls him to such Trial.
This indeed is not our Case at present, and therefore I
shall not spend the Time in fortifying your Minds
against Terrors, removed, I hope, at a great Distance
from us. But it must be owned, that an adulterous and
sinful Generation has more Ways than one of making
Men ashamed of Christ, and of his Words. Though
our Eyes have not beheld any frightful Scenes of Per-
secution, yet we have seen, and daily see, many who
are ashamed of Christ. If the Temptation to this Crime
be now less than in Times of Distress, the Guilt is cer-
tainly greater, and in Equity the Punishment must be
so too. Which Reason will bring the Threatening of
the Text home to every Man, who, in Compliance
with a corrupt Age, does either wickedly reject, or
basely dissemble the Faith of the Gospel.

But that we may not rashly accuse either the Age in
general, or any Men in particular, of this great Crime,
but rather open a Way by which Men may easily ex-
amine their own Consciences upon this Head, and
avoid the like Evil for the future; let us,

First, Inquire into the Nature of the Crime of being ashamed of Christ, and of his Words; and,

Secondly, Into the several Temptations that lead to it.

The Duty opposed to this Crime is expressed in the Language of Scripture by *confessing Christ before Men*; and therefore to be *ashamed of Christ, and of his Words*, is to deny or disown Christ and his Doctrine before Men. In this Language both Parts are expressed in the tenth of St. Matthew: *Whoever, says our Lord, shall confess me before Men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in Heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before Men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in Heaven.*

If we were under no Obligation to confess Christ before the World, there would be no Iniquity in disabling our Knowledge of him; we might keep our Faith and our Religion to ourselves, and by so doing avoid many Inconveniences, to which the open and sincere Professors of the Gospel are oftentimes exposed. There have not wanted some, in all Times, to justify the Prudence of concealing our religious Sentiments, and to encourage Men to live well with the World, in an outward Compliance with the Customs and Opinions of those about them, provided their Hearts be right with God, and sincere in the inward Belief of his Truth. To support this Doctrine, we are called upon to remember that Religion is, in the Nature of the Thing, internal, and has its Seat and Residence in the Heart, and not in the Lips or Tongues of Men: That our Virtue and Obedience will be estimated by our Integrity, and not by the outward Shews and Professions which we make: That God, who knows the Heart, will judge us by it at the last: That, consequently, the only Concern of Religion is to purify the Heart; and,

since the World has nothing to do with our Hearts, we owe it no Account of our Religion; and may lawfully keep from them all Knowledge in a Matter where they have, where they can have, no Cognizance.

To this Plea, another is likewise added, That to suppose it necessary for Men to own the religious Sentiments of their Hearts at the Peril of their Lives, is making God a very hard Master, requiring of us a Service of no Value, at the Expence of all that is dear and valuable to us in this World. What does our Confession avail him, who has a surer Way of judging us than by the Words of our Mouth? Or what does it avail the World, those especially to whom it is to be made, who are hardened and past Conviction, and stand with the Sword uplifted to destroy us the Moment we confess the Truth?

It is no Wonder that Flesh and Blood should furnish some plausible Excuses for declining a Duty so very hard to practise, when it comes to the Cases of the last Extremity: But yet these are but Excuses, and founded in Ignorance of the Nature of Religion, and of the great Ends to be served by it.

Were we to estimate our Religion by the Service or Benefit done to God, we might part with it all at once. He gets no more by the Sincerity of our Hearts, than by our outward Professions; and therefore upon this View we may bid adieu to both. If you think, however, that there is something in inward Sincerity that is agreeable in his Sight, that renders Men acceptable to him, I wonder, at the same time, you should not think Hypocrisy and Dissimulation with the World odious in his Sight, and such Vices as will render us detestable to him. To suppose inward Sincerity consistent with an external Hypocrisy towards the World, is itself a very great Absurdity. For what is Hypocrisy? Is it

not

not professing one thing, and meaning another? And is not this the very Case, when a Man, supposed to be right in his Faith towards God, denies his Faith before the World? Yes, you will say; but this is only dissembling towards the World, and not towards God. I beseech you, whence this Distinction? What is dissembling towards God? Was ever any Man so foolish, as to imagine that he could indeed deceive God by any kind of Dissimulation? No Hypocrite can have this Notion. If he is an Atheist, he has no Thought of deceiving God, whose very Being he denies. If he is not an Atheist, he must needs know so much of God, as to know it to be impossible for him to impose on God. Hypocrisy therefore has no higher Aim than to deceive the World; and whoever denies the Religion he believes in his Heart, or professes one which he does not believe, is a formal Hypocrite, and subject to all the Charges and Penalties brought against Hypocrisy in Holy Writ. So that supposing a Man obliged to say any thing about his Religion, he must necessarily say the Truth, or be liable to the Pains of Hypocrisy and Dissimulation.

But it may be farther asked perhaps, How comes it to be necessary for a Man to say any thing about his Religion? How comes Confession with the Mouth to be made a Term of Salvation in the Gospel? Is not Religion a Transaction between God and every Man's own Soul? How come the rest of the World then to be concerned about my Religion? What Right have they to inquire about it? Or where is the Reason, why I should be bound to inform them concerning it by an open Profession of my Belief?

To come to a clear Resolution of this Question, we must consider the Nature of Religion, and the Ends proposed to be served by it. For, if Religion be nothing else but a secret Transaction between God and the Soul

of Man, no Reason can be assigned why we should publish to the World an Affair in which they have no Concern. But the Case is otherwise; for though nothing is properly Religion but as it respects God; yet, generally speaking, the Duties of Religion regard this World; and have a very great Influence upon the Well-being of it. We must have a very strange Notion of God, if we can imagine that he requires any Duty of us merely for his own sake. What can he get by our Service? What additional Glory and Honour can accrue to the eternal Godhead from our Prayers or Praises?

When God made us reasonable Creatures, he made us capable of knowing and obeying him. The great Character in which he appears to us of Governor of the World, is that which demands our Obedience. And consequently Religion is a Principle of Obedience to God as Governor of the World. It cannot therefore possibly be a mere secret Concern between God and every Man's Conscience, since it respects him in so publick a Character, and must extend to every Thing in which God, as Governor of the World, is supposed to be concerned. To deny a Prince's Authority in his own Dominions is a Degree of Treason; and if Religion does in truth respect God as Governor of the World, to own his Authority in the World must needs be the principal Article of it. For surely it is impossible to pay the proper Respect and Obedience which is due to the Governor of the World, whilst we deny him, in the Face of the World, to be the Governor of it. Thus from the Nature of Religion it appears, that to profess our Belief and Faith in God as Governor of the World is an essential Article, without the Observance of which we can by no means pretend to be religious.

But farther: If any religious Obedience be due to God as Governor of the World, it must principally consist in promoting the great End of his Government. We can never be obedient Subjects to any Government, whilst we endeavour to disturb all the Ends and Designs which such Government was ordained to promote. Now suppose the End of God's Government of the World, with respect to the rational Part of it, to be whatever your Reason shall suggest to you, certain it is, that whoever teaches and encourages Men to deny God to be Governor of the World, and this every Man does who refuses to own him as such, does, in the most effectual Manner, disturb the End of his Government: And this is absolutely inconsistent with Religion, if Religion be a Principle of Obedience to God as Governor of the World.

Against If it be really, as it is, impossible for us to do God any private Service by which he may be the better, it is very absurd to imagine that Religion can consist, or be preserved by any secret Belief or Opinion, how cordially soever embraced. What Thanks can be due to you for silently believing God to be the Governor of the World, whilst you openly deny it, and in your Actions disclaim it? Even this Principle, which is the Foundation of all Religion, has nothing of Religion in it, so long as it is inactive, and consists in Speculation, without bringing forth Fruits agreeable to such a Persuasion: Much less can it be Religion, whilst you openly deny it, and in Words and Actions disclaim it. We can no otherwise show our Love or Obedience to God, than by doing our Brethren's good, which Reason all Duties of Religion, though performed with the greatest Regard to God, have the Good of the World for their immediate Object. Which is true, even of those Duties, which seem most directly to respect

respect the Honour and Glory of God: For, when the Honour of God is promoted in the World, happy is it for the World; for the Benefit and Advantage will all be their own; and God seeks to be honoured, that his Creatures may be happy: His own Happiness wants no Advancement. Now if this be the true Spirit of Religion; if we have no Way of doing Honour to God, but by teaching his People to know and to obey him, that they may become acceptable in his Sight, and happy in his Favour and Protection; how is it that you conceive that there can be any Religion in a secret Opinion, in a dissembled Faith, contradicted by an open Denial of God; which truly is a Dishonour to him, as it tends to make his People forget him, and render themselves miserable?

Lastly, If it be any Part of Religion to promote Religion and the Knowledge of God's Truth in the World, it cannot be consistent with our Duty to dissemble, or to deny our Faith. We see how infectious Example is; and if we wanted Evidence, this Age should witness how catching the Spirit of Libertinism is. The Man who hides his own Religion close in his Heart, tempts others, who suspect not his Hypocrisy, to throw theirs quite out; and whilst he rejoices in this Sheet Anchor of a pure inward Faith, he sees others who steer after him make shipwreck of their Faith and their Salvation. And if he can in the mean time think himself innocent, and void of Offence towards God and towards Man, his Understanding is as unaccountable as his Faith.

These Reasons, I think, will entitle me to conclude, that it is Part of every Man's Religion to own the Faith and Hope that is in him: That it is absurd to have any Reliance upon a secret Faith, which is of no Use to him who has it, as long as it is kept secret; and whenever such Faith is openly contradicted or denied,

denied, it may aggravate, but never can atone for the Hypocrisy.

I have hitherto spoken in general of denying God, and his Truth; and have reasoned upon the Nature of Religion in general, in order to come at my Conclusion. The Text indeed speaks particularly of being ashamed of Christ, and of his Word; but then it speaks to such as believe in Christ, for others are not liable to the Charge of being ashamed of him: The very Nature of the Crime here mentioned supposes a Faith in the Gospel. Now, to every Believer in Christ, and in his Words, the Arguments already used are directly applicable. If we believe him to have received all Power from the Father, and that he is our Governor, and shall be our Judge, there is the same Reason to profess this Faith, the same Danger in dissembling it, as our Faith in God, considered as Governor of the World. If we receive the Words of Christ, they are to us the Truths of God, and must be professed with the same Constancy; or denied with the same Hazard of our Salvation.

Under this Head I have one Thing more to observe to you, That there are in this Vice, as indeed in most others, very different Degrees. While some were contented to hide themselves, and dissemble their Acquaintance with Christ, St. Peter openly denied him, and confirmed it with an Oath, that he knew not the Man. Thus some for Fear in former Ages, those Days of Persecution, denied their Lord, and some in these Days, such is our unhappy Case, are so vain and conceited, as to be ashamed of the Lord who bought them. Among these, some openly blaspheme him; others are content to make a Sport of his Religion; whilst a third Sort profess a Pleasure in such Conversation, though their Hearts ache for their Iniquity, but they

they want the Courage to rebuke even by their Silence the Sin of the Scorners. All these are in the Number of those who are ashamed of Christ: To all these it shall be one Day said, *I know ye not*. For, if this great Woe be threatened to all such who, to save their Lives, deny their Lord, and have the Extremity of their Case, the Cruelty of their Enemies, and the natural Infirmities of Men, to plead in their Behalf; what must be their Lot; who, for the same Iniquity, have little more to alledge, than that they did it to please an idle Companion? But this Consideration will meet us again under the other Head, which is,

Secondly, To inquire into the several Temptations, which lead Men to this Crime of being *ashamed of Christ, and of his Words*.

The Fountain from which these Temptations spring is plainly enough described in the Text, *This adulterous and sinful Generation*. And we know full well, that there is not a natural Fear lurking in the Heart of Man; but the World knows how to reach it; not a Passion; but it has an Enchantment ready for it; no Weakness, no Vanity; but it knows how to lay hold of it: So that all our natural Hopes and Fears, our Passions, our Infirmities, are liable to be drawn into the Conspiracy against Christ, and his Word. Now you see the Source of these Temptations, it is easy to conceive how many, and in their Kinds how various they are. But there is one Distinction to be made, with respect to these Temptations, well worth our observing: Some there are which pursue us, and some there are which we pursue. To the one Sort we unwillingly resign our Faith and our Religion, driven thereunto by Fears and Terrors, or by Pains and Torments, which we are not able to endure. This is the Case of such as fall in Times of Persecution: and we, who are Men of like

Passions,

Passions, cannot but commiserate their Condition, and plead in their Behalf the common Excuse, which belongs to the whole Race, of Weakness and Infirmary. But the other Kind of Temptations come upon our Invitation: We make our Faith a Sacrifice to the great Idol, the World, when we part with it for Honour, Wealth, or Pleasure. In this Circumstance Men take Pains to shew how little they value their Religion, and seek Occasions to display their Libertinism and Infidelity, in order to make their Way to the Favour of a corrupt and degenerate Age. This Behaviour admits of no Excuse. These are they, who, properly speaking, love the World more than God and his Christ; and let us not envy them the Love of the World, for they will find it a dear Purchase at the last.

But whenever Infidelity grows into Credit and Repute, and the World has so vitiated a Taste, as to esteem the Symptoms of Irreligion as Signs of a good Understanding and sound Judgment; when there is so little Sense of serious Things left, that a Man cannot appear to be in earnest concerned for his Religion without being thought a Fool, or suspected to be a Knave; then there arises another Temptation to make Men ashamed of Christ, and of his Word. No Man likes to be despised by those about him; and he who wants perhaps neither Riches nor Honour, wants however to live in Credit, and in good Esteem with his Acquaintance, and to preserve at least the Character of a Man of Sense and Understanding. How this general and almost natural Inclination must work, whenever the Age is so far debauched, as to esteem Irreligion a sure Sign of a good Understanding, is easily conceived. Those who have a large Share of Vanity will be drawn in to approve and encourage, to admire and imitate the much celebrated Freedom of thinking; for so it is

called, though, properly speaking, it might more truly be stiled a Freedom of talking. Others will be tempted to sit still, and give way to the Humour of the World; and will carefully hide their Faith in their Hearts, for fear any Signs of it should appear to the utter Discredit of their Understanding. This is, this always will be, the Case in such Circumstances. But what must be done, may some say? Must we seclude ourselves from Conversation, or must we set up to reprove and rebuke every idle Word we hear? If we do, our Company will soon leave us, though we leave not them. Wonderful Difficulties these! So hard, it seems, it is to refrain from the Company of those, who make a Mock of Sin! An Hardship which a good Man would chuse, and which every bad one must chuse, if ever he intends to forsake the Error of his Ways. There is a Contagion in ill Company, and he who dwells with the Scorners shall not be guiltless. But, since these Difficulties appear so great, compare them with the real Hardships that surrounded the Christians of the first Ages: They lived in Perils, on all Sides were Terrors, within were Fears, without was Death. In these Circumstances they were called to confess Christ in the Face of an enraged and cruel World; and the Rule given them to go by was, not to fear those, who could kill the Body only, but to fear him, who could destroy both Body and Soul everlastingly. If this was their Rule under such real Difficulties, what must be yours under such pretended ones? If they were not permitted to fear the Rage of Kings and Princes, shall you be excused for fearing the Scorn or the Resentment of a light Companion? If they were called to brave the Sword, and to look every Image of Death boldly in the Face; shall you find Pity, because you were afraid perhaps of being laughed at, and despised by those who are void of Understanding?

But

But not to insist upon this, which may perhaps be too high a Degree of Virtue for the Times we live in, let us come lower: If you care not to be a Reprover or Rebukes of this Iniquity, yet surely there is no Necessity for you to be an Admirer or Encourager of it: It is no great Sacrifice you make to Christ, when you resign your Share of the Applause, which belongs to those who persecute and blaspheme him. In a word: Consider with yourselves that Religion is, of all others, the most serious Concern. If its Pretensions are founded in Truth, it is Life to embrace them, it is Death to despise them. We cannot in this Case stand neuter: We cannot serve two Masters; we must hold to the one, and despise the other. If we confess Christ before Men, he will also confess us before God, and his holy Angels: If we deny him before Men, he will deny us at the last Day, when he shall come in the Glory of his Father to judge the World.

Had our Lord been merely a Teacher of good Things, without any special Commission or Authority from the great Creator and Governor of the World, it would have been highly absurd to assume to himself this great Prerogative of being owned and acknowledged before Men. Several have from the Light of Reason taught many good Lessons to the World: But are we bound to take every reasonable Man, who recommends the Practice of Virtue, for our Master? to own his Authority at the Peril of our Lives? No Man ever thought so. *Socrates* taught many great Things to the *Greeks* before Christ came into the World. If he followed Reason, he did well; and we shall do well to follow it too, and farther we have no Concern with him. But, if there be any Truth at all in the Gospel, the Case is far otherwise with respect to our Blessed Redeemer; we must own his Authority, we must con-

fess him before the World, be the Danger of so doing
 ever so great or extreme. Whence arises this Obli-
 gation? It cannot rest merely upon this, that he was a
 Teacher of Reason and good Morality; for in that Case
 it would be sufficient to submit to the Reason and the
 Rules of Morality which he taught, without concern-
 ing ourselves with his Authority, which was no more
 than what Reason and Virtue give every Man. But the
 Case with us is otherwise. Our Lord requires of us,
 that we should confess him before Men; and has de-
 clared, that if we deny him before the World, he will
 deny us in the Presence of God and his holy Angels,
 when he comes to judge the Quick and the Dead.
 Consider what manner of Person is this, who requires
 so much at our Hands. If he is indeed the Son of
 God; if all Power in Heaven and Earth is given him
 by the Father; if he is constituted by God Judge of all
 Men, there is a clear Reason to justify his Demand,
 and our Obedience: But if he was only a mere
 Teacher of Morality and Religion, how is he to be
 justified in pretending to be the only Son of God, in
 pretending to have all Power given him in Heaven and
 Earth, and to be appointed Judge of all Men? You
 must either own him under these Characters, or you
 must condemn him as an Impostor for claiming them.
 How far these who are willing to admit Christ to be a
 good Teacher, but refuse to acknowledge him in any
 other Character, are chargeable with seeing this Con-
 sequence, I know not; nor can I see, if they consider
 it, how they can avoid it.

When therefore we read that our Lord requires of us
 to confess him before Men, the true Way to know what
 we are to confess, is to reflect what he confessed him-
 self; for it cannot be supposed that he thought it
 reasonable for himself to make one Confession, and for

his

his Disciples and Servants, to make another. Look then into the Gospel, and see his own Confession: He confessed himself to be the only Son of God; to come from the Bosom of the Father to die for the Sins of the World; to have all Power given to him in Heaven and Earth; to be the Judge of the World. When you have weighed these Things, read his Words, and judge what your Duty is: *Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my Words, in this adulterous and sinful Generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the Glory of his Father, with the holy Angels.*

When he comes to judge the Quick and the Dead. Consider what manner of Person is this, who requires so much at our Hands. Is he indeed the Son of God; if all Power in Heaven and Earth is given him by the Father; if he is constituted by God Judge of all Men, there is a clear Reason to justify his Demand, and our Obedience: But if he was only a mere Teacher of Morality and Religion, how is he to be justified in pretending to be the Son of God, in pretending to be the Judge of Men? You must either must condemn them, or you must condemn them. How far shall we go? Shall we say that Christ to be a Good Teacher, but not to be Judge him in any other Character, are chargeable with teaching this Conscience, I know not; nor can I see, if they consider it, how they can avoid it.

When therefore we read that our Lord requires of us to count him before Men, the true Way to know what we are to count, is to reflect what he counted himself; for it cannot be supposed that he thought it reasonable for himself to make one Confession, and for

For the purpose of the present inquiry, it is necessary to consider the nature of the evidence which is to be produced. The evidence is to be produced in the form of a statement, and the statement is to be made in the presence of the court. The statement is to be made in the presence of the court, and the court is to be satisfied that the statement is true. The court is to be satisfied that the statement is true, and the court is to be satisfied that the statement is true.

DISCUSSION
The purpose of the present inquiry is to determine the nature of the evidence which is to be produced. The evidence is to be produced in the form of a statement, and the statement is to be made in the presence of the court. The statement is to be made in the presence of the court, and the court is to be satisfied that the statement is true. The court is to be satisfied that the statement is true, and the court is to be satisfied that the statement is true.

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CONCLUSION
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DISCOURSE XVII.



2 CORINTHIANS V. 10, 11.

We must all appear before the Judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the Things done in his Body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

Knowing therefore the Terrors of the Lord, we persuade Men.

T is the Privilege and distinguishing Character of a rational Being to be able to look forward into Futurity, and to consider his Actions, not only with respect to the present Advantage or Disadvantage arising from them, but to view them in their Consequences through all the Parts of Time in which himself may possibly exist. If therefore we value the Privilege of being reasonable Creatures, the only Way to preserve it, is to make use of it; and by extending our Views into all the Scenes of Futurity, in which we ourselves must bear a Part, to lay the Foundation of solid and durable Happiness.

By

By the Exercise of this Power of Reason, the Wisest among the Heathens discovered, that there was Ground for Men to have Expectations beyond this Life. They saw plainly that, themselves, and all Things that fell under their Observation, were dependent Beings on the Will and Power of him who formed them; and when they sought to find him, they were led by a necessary Chain of Reasoning to the Acknowledgment of a Supreme, independent, intelligent Being. They saw in every Part of the Creation evident Marks of his Power, Wisdom, and Goodness: They discerned that all the inanimate Parts of the World acted perpetually in Submission to the Law of their Creation; the Sun and all the Host of Heaven were constant to their Courses; and, in every other Part, the Powers of Nature were duly and regularly exerted for the Preservation of the present System: Among Men only they found Disorder and Confusion. That they had Reason, was plain; that they were intended to live according to Reason, could not be doubted; and yet they saw Virtue often distressed and abandoned to all the Evils of Life, Vice triumphant, and the World every where subject to the Violence of Pride and Ambition. How to account for this they knew not: This only they could observe, that Man was endowed with a Freedom in acting, which the other Beings of the lower World wanted; and to this they rightly ascribed the Disorders to be found in this Part of the Creation. But though this accounted for the Growth of Evil, yet it rendered no Account of the Justice or Goodness of God in permitting Vice oftentimes to reign here in Glory, whilst Virtue suffered in Distress. Upon these Considerations they concluded, that there must be another State after this, in which all the present Inequalities in the Administration of Providence

dence should be set right; and every Man receive according to his Works.

This was, this is the Ground of our natural Expectation of a Life after this. But upon this Ground of Truth many Fables and Stories were raised, by Fear and Superstition, and by the Power of Imagination: So that the general Belief, though right in its Foundation, yet in almost all the Particulars of it was rendered ridiculous and absurd. Hence it is, that among the Writers of Antiquity, we sometimes find wise Men ridiculing the Follies and Superstitions of the People, and bad Men always arguing from these Follies against the very Notion itself, and calling in question the Reality of any future State.

Under these Circumstances of the World, our Blessed Lord appeared to bring to Light Life and Immortality through the Gospel. Let us then consider how this fundamental Article of Religion now stands upon the Foot of the Gospel Revelation.

As to the principal Point, there is no Difference between the Hopes conveyed to us in the Gospel, and the Expectation built upon natural Reason: For, as the wisest Men thought there must be, so the Gospel assures us there will be, *a Day in which God will judge the World in Righteousness, and render to every Man according to his Works.* Thus far then the Doctrine of the Gospel and the Dictates of natural Reason must stand or fall together. If this Doctrine has had a larger and more extensive Influence through the Authority of the Gospel, than it could have had by the mere Force of speculative Reasoning, the World has received an Advantage by the Encouragement given to Virtue, and the Restraint laid upon Vice by these Means, which ought ever to be acknowledged with Thankfulness.

But the Gospel has added to this Doctrine, and communicated to us the Knowledge of some Circumstances, which were not discoverable but by the Means of Revelation; and they are principally these: That there shall be a Resurrection of the Body; That Christ shall be Judge of the World; That the Rewards and Punishments in another Life shall be in Proportion to our Behaviour in this.

I shall speak briefly to these Particulars, and shew for what Purpose they were revealed.

First, The Resurrection of the Body was revealed to give all Men a plain and a sensible Notion of their being subject to a future Judgment. Death is the Destruction of the Man; and sure we are that the lifeless Body is no Man; and whatever Notions some may have of the Soul in its State of separate Existence, yet a mere Spirit is not a Man; for Man is made of Soul and Body. And therefore to bring the Man into Judgment to answer for his Deeds, the Soul and Body must be brought together again. This Doctrine, established upon the Authority of the Gospel, does not remove all Prejudices of the Case, when examined by the short and scanty Notions we have of the Powers of Nature; but it effectually removes all Difficulties that affect this Belief, considered with respect to Religion and Morality. For the single Point in which Religion is concerned, is to know whether Men shall be accountable hereafter for their Actions here. Reason tells us they ought to be so: But a great Difficulty arises from the Dissolution of the Man by Death; a Difficulty followed by endless Speculations upon the Nature of the Soul, of its separate Existence, of its Guilt in this separate State with respect to Crimes committed in another, and in Conjunction with the Body, and by other Difficulties of the like kind. But take in the Declaration of the Gospel, that Soul and
Body

Body shall be as certainly united at the Resurrection as they were divided by Death, and every Man be himself again; and there is no more Difficulty in conceiving that Men may be judged for their Iniquities hereafter, than there is in conceiving that they may be judged here, when they offend against the Laws of the Country.

But still there are Prejudices remaining: To some it is incredible that the Dead should be raised. To these we answer, upon the Foot of the Gospel Evidence, That the Dead have been raised; upon the Foot of Reason, That it is altogether as credible, that God should be able to raise the Dead to Life a second Time, as that he was able to give them Life at first. There is no Difference in the Cases; they are Acts of one and the very same Power.

But we are farther asked, What Body shall be raised, since no Man has exactly the same Body two Days together? New Parts are perpetually added by Nutrition, old ones carried off by Perspiration: So that in the Compass of a few Years an human Body may be almost totally altered, and be no more the same than a Ship which has been so often repaired that no Part of the original Materials is left. But this Objection, as plausible as it may seem, has nothing to do in the present Case; for Religion is concerned only to preserve the Identity or Sameness of the Person, as the Object of future Judgment; and has nothing to do with that kind of Identity against which the Objection can be supposed to have any Force. Were the Case otherwise, the Difficulty would be really as great in human judgments in this Life, as in the divine Judgment hereafter. Suppose a Man should commit Murder when he was twenty, and not be discovered till he was sixty, and then brought to Trial; would common Sense admit him to plead that he was not the same Person who committed the Fact;

and to alledge, in Proof of it, the Alterations in his Body for the last forty Years? Suppose then that, instead of being discovered at sixty, he should die at sixty; and should rise either with the Body he had at sixty, or twenty, or in any intermediate Time, would not the Case be just the same with respect to the future Judgment? Evidently it would be the same: Which shews that the Article of the Resurrection, as far as it is a Support of Religion, and of a future Judgment, stands quite clear of this Difficulty.

But the Prejudices which affect Men most, when they consider this Article of the Resurrection, arise from the weakest of all Imaginations, that they can judge from the settled Laws and Course of Nature, what is or is not possible to the Power of God. It is very true, that all our Powers are bounded by the Laws of Nature; but does it follow that his Power must be so bounded, who appointed these Laws of Nature, and could have appointed others, if he had thought proper? We cannot raise a dead Body; our Hands are tied up by the Laws of Nature, which we cannot surpass. Neither can we make or create a new Man; but we certainly know, from Reason and Experience, that there is one who can: And what can induce us to suppose that he cannot give Life to a Body a second time, who we certainly know gave Life to it at first? These Prejudices therefore we may safely refer to the Power of the Almighty, to which all Nature is obedient, and upon which we may securely depend for the Performance of divine Promises, how unpromising soever the Circumstances may seem to be which attend them. When the Sadducees denied the Resurrection, our Saviour told them, *Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the Power of God*: Intimating plainly, that for the Security and Certainty of our Resurrection we must trust

to Scripture, and the Declaration of God's Purpose contained therein; and for the Method and Means of bringing this great Work to pass, we must rely on the Power of God.

But whatever Difficulties of this kind may remain, yet this Article has removed all which lie in the Way of our considering ourselves as accountable Creatures, and subject to the future Judgment of God. Whatever you may imagine to be the State of separate Souls; whatever Difficulties may arise in considering a mere Spirit as accountable for the Actions of this compound Being Man, they are all out of the question. It is not a mere Spirit, but the Man himself, who is to be brought to Judgment, and plain Sense must see and acknowledge the Reasonableness of judging a Man hereafter for the Crimes committed in this Life; as evidently as it sees the Reasonableness of judging him here, when his Crimes happen to be detected. So that the Revelation in this Particular has brought Faith and common Sense to a perfect Agreement.

Secondly, The Gospel Revelation has made known to us, that Christ shall be Judge of the World.

Our Saviour tells us, that *the Father judgeth no Man, but hath committed all Judgment to the Son*, John v. 22. And again: *The Father hath given him Authority to execute Judgment, because he is the Son of Man*, ver. 27. And St. Peter declares, that the Apostles had it expressly in their Commission to publish this Doctrine to all the World: *He commanded us to preach unto the People, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of Quick and Dead*, Acts x. 42. Accordingly St. Paul, in his short Discourse to the Men of Athens, fully instructed them in this material Point: *God hath appointed a Day in the which he will judge the World in Righteousness, by the Man whom he*

both ordained; whereof he hath given Assurance unto all Men, in that he hath raised him from the Dead, Acts xvii. 31.

I will not multiply Texts to this Purpose, though many more there are which speak the same Sense, because this Doctrine is very well known to Christians, and is Part of the Creed which we daily rehearse.

But it is material to observe, that this Authority is given to Christ, *because he is the Son of Man*, as he himself has assured us; and that the Person ordained to be Judge is a Man, even *the Man whom God raised from the Dead*, as St. Paul asserts. How happy is it for us to have a Judge, I had almost said so partial, but I may well say so favourable to us, that he was content to be himself the Sacrifice to redeem us from the Punishment due to our Sins? When we consider ourselves how wretched and weak we are, how perpetually doing wrong either wilfully or ignorantly, and contemplate the infinite Majesty, Holiness and Justice of God, what Account can we hope to give of ourselves to him, whose Eyes are purer than to behold Iniquity? But see, God hath withdrawn his Terrors, and has given a Man to be the Judge of Men. So that we may say of our Judge, what the Apostle to the *Hebrews* says of our High-Priest; *We have not a Judge, which cannot be touched with the Feeling of our Infirmities; but was in all things tempted like as we are, yet without Sin.*

You may think perhaps that this is drawing Consequences upon the Foot of vulgar Apprehensions, and that in Reality there is no Difference, whether God be Judge himself, or commits the Judgment to the Son of Man: For, since Christ shall come not only in the Power, but in the Wisdom and the Justice of God also to judge the World, what Difference can there be in the Judgment, since in both Cases it must be guided and
formed

formed by the Wisdom and Justice of God? True it is, that a mere Man is not qualified to be Judge of the World; the Knowledge of Hearts is necessary to the right Discharge of that Office; a Knowledge which no mere Man was ever endowed with. But still, if the Man is to be Judge, the Sentiments, Notions, and Feeling of the Man, however guided and influenced by superior Wisdom, must preside over and govern the whole Action; otherwise the Man will not be Judge. And hence we may answer some Difficulties, which speculative Men have brought into the Subject of a future Judgment. Some have imagined that Justice, Mercy and Goodness in God are not of the same Kind with Justice, Mercy and Goodness in Men; and therefore that we can never, from our Notions of these Qualities in Man, argue consequentially to the Attributes of God, or to the Acts flowing from these Attributes. The Result of which is, that when we talk of God's Justice or Mercy in judging the World, we talk of something which we do not understand. But, if Men would consult Scripture, these Difficulties would not meet them in their Way: For surely we know what Justice, Mercy and Goodness mean among Men; and since the Scripture assures us, that the Man whom God raised from the Dead is ordained Judge of the World, we may be very certain that the Justice, Mercy and Goodness, to be displayed in the future Judgment, will be such as all Men have a common Sense and Apprehension of; unless you can imagine that a new Rule is to be introduced, to which the Judge, and those to be judged, are equally Strangers. Upon this Foot of Scripture then we may certainly know, what the Justice, Mercy and Goodness are by which we must finally stand or fall; and this Point being secured, the Speculation may be left to shift for itself.

And

And thus you see how this great and fundamental Article of Religion, involved in Darkness in former Ages, is made plain and sensible to Mankind by the Light of the Gospel. That Men were accountable, they always knew; that there would be a future Judgment, was generally believed; but how Men were to appear in Judgment, or how mere unbodied Spirits were to be judged, how rewarded, or how punished, they knew not. That the Right of judging Men was in God, was well known; but how he would exercise it, whether by himself or another, visibly or invisibly, they knew not. Infinite were the Disputes upon this Subject: Instead of which the Gospel has given a plain sensible Representation, assuring us that at the Judgment we shall be what we now are, Men, real Men; and that the Man Christ Jesus, who appeared in the World to redeem us, will appear again to judge us by that very Gospel, and those very Rules, which he has left us to govern and conduct ourselves by.

Thirdly, Let us then go one Step farther, and view the Consequences of this Judgment; this solemn Judgment, which every Mortal must undergo. If we consult either Scripture or Reason, we shall find no Evidence of any farther Change to be made in our future State, after once Judgment has passed on us. That we are accountable, and shall therefore be judged, Reason says; but can see nothing relating to us after Judgment, except the Reward or the Punishment consequent upon it: And therefore the only Conclusion to be drawn from this Information is, that the Condition of Man will be finally determined as to Happiness or Misery, and consequently that Man must continue under the good or the bad Effects of the last Judgment.

As Reason can shew us nothing beyond Judgment, but that State and Condition which are the Effect of it,

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to the Holy Scripture has given us Reason to think that nothing else there shall be, by describing the Rewards and Punishments of another Life, as having perpetual Duration. Life eternal is prepared for the Righteous, and everlasting Punishment for the Wicked. The Fire prepared to receive them is never to go out, the Worm prepared to torment them will never die. These Images carry great Terror with them, and have led some to a milder Interpretation of the Threats of Scripture than the Language of it seems to import. But even the mildest Interpretation, that allows any Meaning at all to those Threats, supposes the Punishment to last as long as the Sinner lasts. So that in this, the lowest View, our all depends upon the Judgment which shall be finally passed on us at the second Coming of our Lord. There is then a Justness of Thought, as well as great Charity to the Souls of Men, in what the Apostle adds, *Knowing the Terror of the Lord, not persuade Men.* If the Christian Revelation has cleared our Doubts, by bringing Life and Immortality to Light through the Gospel; if it has given us Ground for Hope and Confidence by assuring us that we shall be judged by him, who so loved us, that he gave himself for us, and submitted to die, that we might live; it has also given us Ground to be watchful and careful over ourselves, and to work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling. For it is a fearful Thing to be to answer for ourselves before the Searcher of all Hearts; to answer to him who loved us, for despising the Love he shewed us; to answer to him who died for us, for having crucified him afresh, and put him to open Shame; and for having accounted the Blood of the Covenant an unholy Thing. This will be the sad Case of every wilful Sinner. The View of this Misery and Distress, which Sinners are calling upon themselves by their Iniquity, moved the Apostle,

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DISCOURSE XVII. 271

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Apostle, and must ever move those who succeed to his Office, to warn Men *to flee from the Wrath that is to come.* We know the *Terror of the Lord,* and therefore *persuade Men.* Happy would it be, if Men, knowing and considering these Terrors, would suffer themselves to be persuaded. Which God grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord: *To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all Honour and Glory, henceforth, and for evermore. Amen.*

END OF THE THIRD VOLUME.



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